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Symposium 2023 in Magdeburg

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INKLINGS
JAHRBUCH FÜR LITERATUR UND ÄSTHETIK

Herausgegeben von Kristin Aubel, Maria Fleischhack,
Marion Gymnich, Carsten Kullmann und Aylin Dilek Walder

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Einleitung

2023 jährten sich die Todestage von J.R.R. Tolkien (50.) und C.S. Lewis (60.); gleichzeitig feierte die deutsche Inklings-Gesellschaft für Literatur und Ästhetik e.V. den 40. Jahrestag ihrer Gründung durch Gisbert Kranz im Jahr 1983. Diese Jubiläen führen vor Augen, dass Leben und Tod nicht nur Gegenstand künstlerischer, literarischer, philosophischer und religiöser Verhandlungen, sondern universelle, menschliche Konstanten sind. Gleichzeitig rückt nicht nur der Umgang mit dem Verlust des Lebens in den Mittelpunkt des menschlichen Interesses, sondern auch die Frage danach, wie der Tod verhindert oder rückgängig gemacht werden kann. Hier knüpft die Phantastik mit ihren erzählerischen Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten jenseits der mimetischen Abbildung unserer Wirklichkeit unmittelbar an.

Unter dem Titel „Dem Tode zum Trotz: Unsterblichkeit und Wiedergeburt in der Phantastik" widmete sich die Inklings-Gesellschaft vom 29. April bis 1. Mai 2023 an der Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg den zahlreichen Schnittmengen dieser Themen und der Phantastik. Im Hinblick auf die theologischen und religiösen Betrachtungsweisen, die dieses Thema eröffnet, bildete das Symposium inhaltlich in gewisser Weise eine Fortführung des Symposiums „Glaube und Religion in der Phantastik", das 2022 in Bochum stattfand. Solche Schwerpunkte lassen sich häufig in den Werken der Oxforder Inklings identifizieren – man denke etwa an Valinor oder Aslans Land als Orte der Unsterblichkeit – doch die hier versammelten Beiträge widmen sich neben den Schriften der Inklings auch Werken der zeitgenössischen Phantastik. Das Jahrbuch beginnt mit Abhandlungen zu Tolkien und Lewis und erweitert dann den Spielraum, in dem die Themen des Symposiums behandelt wurden.

Knut Martin Stünkel untersucht in seinem Beitrag „Tod und Unsterblichkeit im altenglischen Setting: Leben und Nachleben in Tolkiens Rohan" die Ausformung einer Kultur mit konkreten Vorstellungen von Leben, Tod und Unsterblichkeit, die ganz wesentlich auf Tolkiens Kenntnissen der angelsächsischen Lebensart fußt. Aus Sicht der Religionswissenschaft nimmt Stünkel die litera-

rische Darstellung der Unsterblichkeitsvorstellungen der Eorlingas mithilfe Alfred North Whiteheads Konzepts der ‚objektiven Unsterblichkeit' in den Blick. Friedhelm Schneidewind betrachtet in seinem Beitrag „Langlebigkeit, Unsterblichkeit und Wiedergeburt in Mittelerde" ebenfalls die von Tolkien erschaffene Welt und fragt nach Konsistenzen und Widersprüchen in den Konzepten von (Un)Sterblichkeit und Wiedergeburt innerhalb des Legendariums. Anhand dieser Entwicklungshistorie widmet sich Schneidewind auch der Frage nach der Rezeption eines literarischen Gesamtwerkes durch Autor*innen und Leser*innen, die nicht nur in Bezug auf Tolkiens Opus relevant ist.

Anne-Frédérique Mochel-Caballero und Iulia-Teodora Driscu betrachten die Verhandlung von Tod (und Wiedergeburt) in C.S. Lewis' *Die Chroniken von Narnia*. Caballeros Beitrag „‚Unless a Grain of Wheat Falls into the Earth…': Death and Rebirth in *The Chronicles of Narnia*" bringt die biblische Metapher des sterbenden Korns mit dem christlichen Konzept der *felix culpa* in Verbindung, das besagt, dass das, was noch kommen wird, besser ist als das, was vorher war. Caballero interpretiert Lewis' Verwendung der Metapher als ein universelles Prinzip der Abwärts- und Aufwärtsbewegung, die sowohl in der Natur als auch in menschlichen Denksystemen vorkommt. Driscus Beitrag „‚Till Death Do Us Part' – or Not? Death as a Unifier in *The Last Battle by* C.S. Lewis" liest die Todesdarstellung entgegen der weitverbreiteten Vorstellung vom ‚great divider' als ein verbindendes Prinzip, das theologisch gewendet nicht nur eine Verbindung mit Zeitgenoss*innen und Vorfahr*innen darstellt, sondern auch mit dem christlichen Gott. Driscu zieht Parallelen zwischen Lewis' Romanzyklus und biblischen Inspirationsquellen, um ein Verständnis vom Tod als eine Tür zu einem besseren Leben aufzuzeigen.

In ihrem Beitrag „Divine Immortality as a Curse in Madeline Miller's *Circe*" bespricht Raphaela Behounek die Frage, die der Roman aufwirft, ob nämlich die Hexe von Aiaia eine listige und verführerische Zauberin sei oder ob sie nicht eher als eine vielseitige Frauenfigur mit einer ergiebigen Hintergrundgeschichte verstanden werden könne. Behounek liest Millers Neuerzählung des klassischen griechischen Sagenstoffs im Kontext der #MeToo-Bewegung

anhand der Darstellung der Unsterblichkeit der Hauptfigur als Fluch. Anna Lüschers Beitrag „Immortality as Body Horror in T. Kingfisher's *What Moves the Dead*" widmet sich ebenfalls einer Neuerzählung, und zwar der von Edgar Allan Poes Kurzgeschichte „Der Untergang des Hauses Usher". Der im Original kurz erwähnte Fungus wird in Kingfishers Roman zu einer direkten Bedrohung für die Figuren und transformiert, so Lüscher, Unsterblichkeit in eine Quelle für Körperhorror.

Aylin Dilek Walders Beitrag „Depressed Immortals: Immortality and Ecocriticism in Brandon Sanderson's *Elantris*" setzt die Verflechtung von Mensch, Stadt und Natur innerhalb des Romans mit der gegenwärtigen Depressionsepidemie in Beziehung. Walder argumentiert aus ökokritischer Perspektive, dass *Elantris* eine Koexistenz in Symbiose propagiert und die Bedeutung der Verbundenheit des Menschen sowohl mit der Natur als auch mit der städtischen Umwelt betont. Tjorven Carstens betrachtet in „The Ritual of Tellann: Immortality and Its Refusal in Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen*" das Konzept der Unsterblichkeit in der Romanreihe als teleologisch, anstatt, wie noch bei Tolkiens Elben, als natürlich. Carstens kombiniert Nietzsches und Adlers Machttheorien, um die Herausforderungen einer solchen zielgerichteten Unsterblichkeit und deren rhetorische Umsetzung herauszuarbeiten.

Die darauffolgenden drei Beiträge zeichnen sich durch ein hohes Maß an Intermedialität aus. Kristin Aubels Artikel „Deities of Death in Contemporary Popular Fantasy Media" vergleicht anhand des Konzeptes vom Tod als Geschenk bei Derrida und Tolkien die Todesphilosophien, die durch die Todesgottheiten in der *Percy-Jackson*-Reihe, *Critical Role: Vox Machina* und *A Song of Ice and Fire* verkörpert werden. Aubel blickt auf die verschiedenen Gestalten, die die Todesgottheiten annehmen, und untersucht, wie sowohl die Endgültigkeit des Todes als auch die Unparteilichkeit der Gottheiten in Frage gestellt werden. Pia Holste setzt sich in dem Artikel „You Die, Then What? Engaging with Mortality in Collaborative Fantasy Narratives" mit Tabletop-Rollenspielen (TTRPGs) auseinander und untersucht, wie die Spielteilnehmer*innen durch den ludischen Erlebnismodus näher an die in der Erzählung dargestellte Erfahrung herangeführt werden. In ihrem Beitrag „Death as a

Character and Its Philosophical Depiction in Children's Books" widmet sich Artemis Papailia den verschiedenen Darstellungsweisen des Todes und seiner sich wandelnden Funktion in Bilderbüchern für Kinder. Papailia fragt, wie die philosophische Darstellung des Todeskonzepts das philosophische Denken von Kindern anregt und sie ermutigt, durch philosophische ‚Verbindungen' ihrer Welt Bedeutung zu verleihen.

Die beiden abschließenden Beiträge ziehen deutlich konkreter Verbindungslinien zwischen der erzählenden Perspektive der Phantastik und realweltlichen Vorstellungen von Unsterblichkeit und Wiedergeburt. Dominik Bechers Artikel „Zum Greifen nah: Visionen der Unsterblichkeit" bettet aktuelle Überzeugungen der (baldigen) Verfügbarkeit von Unsterblichkeit in die Kulturgeschichte mythischer und spekulativer Erzählungen dieser Vorstellung ein. Bechers Textauswahl reicht dabei vom *Gilgamesh*-Epos bis zum Computerspiel *Cyberpunk 2077* sowie der Serienadaption von Neil Gaimans *Der Sandmann*-Comic und legt nahe, dass sich die Menschheit gegenwärtig einer konkreten Vorstellbarkeit von Unsterblichkeit annähert. Auch Stefan Lampadius zeichnet in seinem Beitrag „Immortality and Digital Rebirth in Science Fiction" Verbindungslinien zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit nach und argumentiert, dass im Kontext des Computerzeitalters eine digitale Kopie des menschlichen Geistes als ein verwandtes Konzept für eine künstliche Lebensverlängerung oder gar als digitale Wiedergeburt erscheint. Die Erörterung des sogenannten ‚Mind Uploading' führt Lampadius von William Gibsons Roman *Neuromancer* bis hin zu Richard Morgans *Altered Carbon* sowie Werken anderer Autoren wie etwa Greg Egan.

Abgeschlossen wird der Band von insgesamt fünf Besprechungen, vier von Thomas Fornet-Ponse, dem an dieser Stelle für seine beständige Bereitstellung spannender Rezensionen ausdrücklich gedankt werden soll, sowie einer weiteren von Carsten Kullmann. Fornet-Ponse bespricht, wie üblich, die *Tolkien Studies* Bände, diesmal Ausgabe XIX sowie eines erstmals veröffentlichten Supplements zwischen den regulär erscheinenden Nummern XVIII und XIX. Mit Thomas Honeggers *Essays on the Epic Fantasy of J.R.R. Tolkien and George R.R. Martin* sowie Hamish Williams' *J.R.R. Tolkien's*

Utopianism and the Classics werden weitere aktuelle Werke aus der Tolkienforschung rezipiert. Carsten Kullmann bespricht Stefan Ekmans Monographie *Urban Fantasy: Exploring Modernity through Magic*, die sich erstmals in Buchlänge dem gleichnamigen Genre annimmt.

Nicht im Jahrbuch enthalten, aber trotzdem erwähnenswert, ist das Gespräch, das Elmar Schenkel mit Owen A. Barfield zu dessen Großvaters Werk und Philosophie, insbesondere in Bezug auf dessen Seelenverständnis, beim Symposium in Magdeburg führte. Owen A. Barfield ist bemüht, das Werk Barfields einer breiten Öffentlichkeit vorzustellen und zugänglich zu machen. Unter anderem geschieht dies auf der Webseite der Owen Barfield Literary Estate: www.owenbarfield.org.

Dieser Band ist nicht nur der zweite, der nun im Selbstverlag erscheint, sondern auch der erste in der Amtszeit der neuen Redaktion. Aylin Dilek Walder, Carsten Kullmann, Kristin Aubel und Marion Gymnich sei gedankt für die redaktionelle Betreuung der Einsendungen in Folge des Symposiums 2023 in Magdeburg. Swantje Leiting und vor allem Ella Keim gebührt Dank für die tatkräftige Unterstützung bei der Formatierung der Beiträge.

Wenngleich jedem Anfang nach Hermann Hesse bekanntlich ein Zauber innewohnt, bedeuten Neuanfänge immer auch Abschiede. Nach ihrer Mitwirkung am Symposium und an diesem Band zieht sich Maria Fleischhack abseits der Unterstützung bei der Jahrbuch-Digitalisierung von ihren letzten administrativen Funktionen innerhalb des Vereins zurück. Ohne ihre unermüdliche Arbeit über lange Jahre wäre die Inklings-Gesellschaft nicht dort, wo sie heute ist, und jeder Versuch, die Dankbarkeit dafür in Worte zu fassen, würde zu kurz greifen.

Die hier versammelten Beiträge zeugen von der Prävalenz und Aktualität der Phantastik und dem beständigen Einfluss, den die Oxforder Inklings noch immer auf diese ausüben. Ein abschließender Dank gebührt daher allen Beitragenden zu diesem Jahrbuch, ohne deren spannende Betrachtungen phantastischer Themen unser Jahrbuch nicht möglich wäre, sowie all unseren Lesenden.

Carsten Kullmann & Maria Fleischhack

Beiträge zu „Dem Tode zum Trotz: Unsterblichkeit und Wiedergeburt in der Phantastik“

Tod und Unsterblichkeit im altenglischen Setting: Leben und Nachleben in Tolkiens Rohan

Knut Martin Stünkel

Neben idealen Orten der Unsterblichkeit wie die zunehmend entrückten ‚unsterblichen Lande' gibt es im Werk J.R.R. Tolkiens auch Beschreibungen von Bereichen konkreter beziehungsweise diesseitiger Unsterblichkeit. Im Volk von Rohan und insbesondere in seinem König Théoden zeichnet Tolkien das Bild einer Kultur mit konkreten Vorstellungen von Leben, Tod und Unsterblichkeit, für die er seine profunde Kenntnis der angelsächsischen Kultur heranzieht. Mein Artikel untersucht diese immanenten Unsterblichkeitsvorstellungen und ihre literarische Darstellung unter religionswissenschaftlichem Blickwinkel, ausgehend vom Konzept der ‚objektiven Unsterblichkeit' des Philosophen Alfred North Whitehead.

In addition to ideal places of immortality such as the increasingly enraptured 'immortal lands', there are also descriptions of realms of concrete or worldly immortality in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien. With the People of Rohan, and especially King Théoden, Tolkien paints a picture of a culture with concrete ideas of life, death, and immortality, for which he draws on his profound knowledge of Anglo-Saxon culture. My article examines these immanent notions of immortality and their literary representation from the perspective of religious studies, starting from the concept of 'objective immortality' coined by the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead.

Einleitung

Nachleben und Unsterblichkeit haben viele Gesichter (vom Zombie bis zu den Seligen im Paradies), von denen die spektakulärsten nicht unbedingt die nachhaltigsten sind. Für manche Formen von Unsterblichkeit ist es nicht notwendig, vom Tode aufzuerstehen oder gar erst zu sterben. Vor allem sind Vorstellungen und Konzepte von Unsterblichkeit nicht nur in religiöser Perspektive relevant. Sie erfüllen auch ihre spezifischen Funktionen im kulturellen und sozialen Bereich.

Neben idealen Orten der Unsterblichkeit wie die zunehmend entrückten (transzendierten), im Jenseits verschwindenden ‚unsterblichen Lande' der Erstgeborenen (Elben) gibt es im Werk J.R.R. Tolkiens auch Bereiche *konkreter* Unsterblichkeit beziehungsweise eines *immanent bleibenden* Nachlebens. Diese bestimmten Bereiche oder Weisen diesseitiger *objektiver Unsterblichkeit* (den Begriff erläutere ich im Folgenden) finden sich vor allem in chronologisch später auftauchenden Kulturen Mittelerdes, wie zum Beispiel den Hobbits, aber auch bei bestimmten Gruppen von Menschen. Unter diesen Gruppen ist das Volk von Rohan im *Lord of the Rings* am prominentesten und ausführlichsten dargestellt.[1] Für diese Darstellung greift Tolkien auf sein Spezialgebiet als Wissenschaftler zurück; seine akademische Tätigkeit als Philologe ist insbesondere in seiner Beschreibung der Sprache und Kultur Rohans manifestiert (vgl. Shippey 139-45). Tolkien zeichnet hier das Bild einer Kultur mit konkreten Vorstellungen von Leben, Tod und Unsterblichkeit, die ihre Wurzeln in der angelsächsischen Kultur mit ihren charakteristischen Voraussetzungen und Herausforderungen haben. Am deutlichsten werden die in spezifischer Weise transzendierenden Vorstellungen seines Volkes von Unsterblichkeit beziehungsweise Nachleben in den Taten und Äußerungen seines Königs Théoden, dem selbst eine bestimmte Art von Wiedergeburt und ein traditionsgeleitetes immanentes Nachleben zuteil wird.

Ich möchte diese nicht im eigentlichen Sinne religiösen Phänomene dennoch unter einer religionswissenschaftlichen Perspektive untersuchen. Auf diese Weise lassen sich die Emergenz und die Konstitution von Religion anschaulich beschreiben. Mein spezifisches religionswissenschaftliches Interesse richtet sich dabei auf religiöse Schwellenphänomene, die sich als ein ‚religioides' Material in die eine oder andere Form entwickeln können. Die von Tolkien eindringlich beschriebenen Vorstellungen der Bewohner Rohans sind ein solches Material. Im Folgenden erläutere ich zunächst das Konzept der objektiven Unsterblichkeit, sammle und analysiere dann Beispiele für diese Art von Unsterblichkeit in Tolkiens Werk und

1 Im Folgenden zitiert nach der Ausgabe: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Harper Collins, 2021 als *Lord*. Alle Hervorhebungen im zitierten Text stammen von mir.

fasse schließlich die Ergebnisse in einer kurzen Schlussbetrachtung zusammen.

Objektive Unsterblichkeit

Ein nützliches Instrument zur Beschreibung dieser Schwellenphänomene immanenten Nachlebens ist das Konzept der *Objective Immortality* (objektive Unsterblichkeit), welches der Philosoph und Mathematiker Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) entwickelt hat. Der Begriff der *Immortality* hat hier keine religiösen oder göttlichen Konnotationen – genauso wie der Begriff *objective* nicht auf Objekte in einem gängigen Sinne hinweist. In Whiteheads Prozessphilosophie steht eine objektive Unsterblichkeit einer subjektiven Unmittelbarkeit, vor allem einer Emotion, gegenüber. Whiteheads Idee ist es, dass ein Ereignis (*actual entity*/*occasion*, der Grundbaustein seiner Prozessphilosophie) nach seiner jeweiligen Aktualisierung beziehungsweise Realisierung zu einem konstitutiven Element eines weiteren Ereignisses wird, ohne dass es selbst geändert würde. Dieses Element spielt unterschiedliche Rollen bei verschiedenen Nachfolgerereignissen und wird durch diese unterschiedlich interpretiert (kontrastiert) – selbst aber ist dieses Ereignis als Baustein oder Form des Zukünftigen ‚unsterblich'. Der theoretische Kniff hieran ist folgender: Whitehead konnotiert die Aktualisierungen als *emotionale* Erfüllungen, die als solche in den zukünftigen Ereignissen erhalten bleiben. In ihnen wird die jeweilige Emotion neu aktualisiert und somit bestätigt und weitergegeben – die aktuelle wird durch die vergangene Emotion bestätigt (legitimiert). Diese Relation ist ontologisch entscheidend, wie Whitehead in seinem Hauptwerk *Process and Reality* ausführt:

> In these lectures 'relatedness' is dominant over 'quality'. All relatedness has its foundation in the relatedness of actualities; and such relatedness is wholly concerned with the appropriation of the dead by the living – that is to say, with 'objective immortality', whereby what is divested of its own living immediacy becomes *a real component in other living immediacies of becoming*. (xiii-xiv; meine Hervorhebung)

Das Vergangene bietet somit bestimmte (emotional besetzte) Formen, die zum Werden des Gegenwärtigen aktiviert und aktualisiert werden. ‚Ruhm' etwa ist nur eine Möglichkeit, wie sich objektive Unsterblichkeit ausdrücken kann; es gibt eine Reihe weitere, so zum Beispiel Gelerntes, Formen des Umgangs, Bilder, Urszenen, Manieren, Gesten, etc. Auch durch seine besonderen Denk- und Handlungsweisen kann sich etwa ein Früherer objektive Unsterblichkeit in der Nachwelt verschaffen.

Für den religionswissenschaftlichen Zugriff ist das Konzept der objektiven Unsterblichkeit sehr nützlich. Religions*systematisch* stehen Phänomene objektiver Unsterblichkeit am Übergang von religioiden zu im eigentlichen Sinne religiösen Phänomenen.[2] Dies mag auch, aber muss nicht zwingend religions*geschichtlich* der Fall sein, indem etwa angenommen wird, dass Phänomene objektiver Unsterblichkeit zeitlich vor Phänomenen religiöser Unsterblichkeit zu verorten sind beziehungsweise später als letztere, entweder durch die handelnden Personen selbst oder auch den Wissenschaftler als solche beschrieben werden. Insbesondere die angelsächsische Kultur, sprich die bewegten Jahre Britanniens nach dem Abzug der Römer und vor der Ankunft der Normannen 1066, bietet für diesen Übergang ein reichhaltiges Material. Wichtige Elemente dieser Kultur zwischen Diesseits- und Jenseitsreligiosität hat Tolkien für seine Charakteristik des Landes Rohan und seines höchsten Repräsentanten übernommen.

Théoden und die Weisen der Unsterblichkeit

Im Folgenden werde ich einige markante Phänomene objektiver Unsterblichkeit, wie sie von Tolkien im *Lord* unter Zuhilfenahme der angelsächsischen Kultur beschrieben sind, nennen und kurz erläutern. Zuvor ist zu betonen, dass es im Lande König Théo-

2 Vgl. hierzu Simmel: „Ich erinnere an das […] religioide – Moment, das für ein tieferes Empfinden vielleicht in allem Hingeben und Annehmen liegt. […] [I]n seiner inneren Struktur [liegt] eine schwer bezeichenbare ideelle Verwandtschaft mit einem Zuge des religiösen Wesens, der aus diesem in den fertig ausgestalteten Religionen als das Opfermoment auskristallisiert ist" (61-62). Später beschreibt Simmel „Religionen, die in der angedeuteten Weise Mischgebilde sind, in denen die Religiosität noch nicht in der Form der Gegenständlichkeit rein zu sich selbst gekommen ist" (114).

dens, in Rohan, eine ausgeprägte Religiosität, die eine Idee einer transzendenten Unsterblichkeit (etwa im Sinne der christlichen Jenseitsvorstellung) hervorrufen könnte, nicht gibt – Gelegenheiten, eine solche einzuführen, hatte Tolkien allerdings im Laufe des Buches genug: „The Riders, one might say, have a sense of awe or of the supernatural; but they do nothing about it. No religious rites are performed at Théoden's burial. His followers sing a dirge and ride round his barrow […]. The Riders […] do not worship pagan gods" (Shippey 228). Ihre Welt scheint proto-religiös zu sein, und es stellt sich die Frage, wie sie mit Situationen umgehen, in denen Religion prominent zum Einsatz kommen *könnte*.

Dass die Figur Théodens für eine religionswissenschaftliche Analyse besonders geeignet ist, liegt vor allem an ihrer engen und von Tolkien mehrfach intensiv hervorgehobenen Verbindung zur menschlichen Sterblichkeit. Zum Zeitpunkt seines ersten Auftretens im Buch ist der König von Rohan eine einzige Manifestation des Alters, der Niedergedrücktheit und der offensichtlichen Todesverfallenheit. Vor diesem Bild der Sterblichkeit scheint sich jeder Gedanke an Unsterblichkeit von selbst zu verbieten und Théoden selbst ein denkbar ungeeigneter Kandidat für jegliche Art Unsterblichkeit zu sein. Dass er früher einmal anders gewesen ist, trägt nur dazu bei, das jetzige Bild grausamer hervortreten zu lassen:

> [I]n the middle of the dais was a great gilded chair. Upon it sat a man so bent with age that he seemed almost a dwarf. […] His beard was laid like snow upon his knees […] Slowly the old man rose to his feet, leaning heavily upon a short black staff with a handle of white bone; and now the strangers saw that, bent though he was, he was still tall and must in youth have been high and proud indeed. (*Lord* 512)

Zwar hat Tolkien im Prozess der Konzeption und der Niederschrift des *Lord* gegenüber ersten Fassungen massive Änderungen vorgenommen, ganze Geschichten und Personen gestrichen, doch auch entstehungsgeschichtlich scheint für Théoden im Kontext des *Lord* in Sachen Unsterblichkeit nicht viel zu hoffen zu sein. Denn eines ist von Anfang an geplant und unverändert durchgehalten worden: Théodens Tod auf dem Schlachtfeld im Kampf mit dem Herrn der Nazgûl, nachdem das Heer von Rohan den Belagerungsring um die

Stadt Minas Tirith aufgehoben hat. In der *History of Middle-Earth* ist im Band *The War of the Ring* ein Text abgedruckt, den Tolkien zu einem sehr frühen Stadium geschrieben hat, nach Auskunft seines Sohnes lange vor der Komposition dessen, was schließlich *The Return of the King* werden sollte. Dieser Text ist betitelt mit *Fall of Théoden in the Battle of Osgiliath* und erzählt mit geringen Abweichungen die Geschehnisse um Théodens rechtzeitiger Ankunft in der Schlacht, seinen fatalen Sturz vom Pferd und den anschließenden erfolgreichen Kampf Éowyns mit dem Nazgûl (*The War of the Ring* 365-66).

Dass überhaupt die Könige von Rohan – im signifikanten Unterschied zu den Königen Gondors – nichts mit einer transzendenten Unsterblichkeit zu tun haben, wird auch daran deutlich, dass es ihnen (in Form des Sohnes des zweiten Königs mit Namen Baldor, altenglisch ‚König') nicht vergönnt ist, die ‚Pfade der Toten' zu durchschreiten. Wenn sie die Pfade der Toten betreten, bleiben sie tot. Der Erbe Gondors hingegen schreitet später, als er im Ringkrieg die Pfade der Toten betritt, gewissermaßen über das Skelett des Prinzen hinweg (*Lord* 787).

Doch es ist eben diese Affinität der Figur Théodens zur Sterblichkeit, die ihn zu einem idealen Träger von Ideen einer weltlichen, einer objektiven Unsterblichkeit macht. Théoden erlebt zunächst eine Wiedergeburt – im Rahmen seiner Möglichkeiten – und schließlich eine entsprechende Unsterblichkeit. Der von höheren Mächten vom Tode zur Erfüllung seiner Aufgabe zurückgeschickte Gandalf holt den siechenden Théoden ins Leben (und in den Krieg) zurück.[3] Es ist ein sichtbares Auferstehen vor einer Reihe von Augenzeugen:

3 Vgl. zur Relation von Gandalfs Auferstehung zu der Théodens – jene ist Voraussetzung dieser – Tolkiens Briefentwurf an Robert Murray vom 4. November 1954: „The ‚wizards', as such, had failed; or if you like: the crisis had become too grave and needed an enhancement of power. So Gandalf sacrificed himself, was accepted, and enhanced, and returned. [….] When he speaks he commands attention; the old Gandalf could not have dealt so with Théoden, nor with Saruman" (*Letters* 202).

> From the king's hand the black staff fell clattering on the stones. He drew himself up, slowly, as a man that is stiff from long bending over some dull toil. Now tall and straight he stood, and his eyes were blue as he looked into the opening sky. "Dark have been my dreams of late" he said, "but *I feel as one new-awakened* […]". (*Lord* 516)

Entsprechend bedeutet der Name *Ednew* für Théoden aus den Anhängen zum *Lord* ‚der Erneuerte'. Doch erschöpft sich die objektive Unsterblichkeit natürlich nicht in diesem vielleicht allzu sinnfälligen Bild eines (gefühlten!) Auferstehungsgeschehens, einer körperlich-geistigen Wiedererweckung. Gandalf stärkt den König zudem durch Hinweis auf die Insignien von Macht und Jugend und deren revitalisierenden Gebrauch – einmal gelernte tradierte Formen werden hier emphatisch neu aktualisiert: „‚Your fingers would remember their old strength better, if they grasped a sword-hilt', said Gandalf" (517).

Eine weitere Form dieser Unsterblichkeit geschieht durch eine Verkörperung eines sagenhaften Erbes, genauer gesagt eines *mythischen Bildes*. Es findet ein mythisches oder sogar religiöses Reenactment eines Bildes statt, durch welches das aktuelle Ereignis bestätigt beziehungsweise lesbar gemacht wird. Für einen Moment in der Erzählung repräsentiert Théoden ein generationenübergreifendes Element und sogar ein göttliches Prinzip. Diese kann man nicht einfach ignorieren oder hinter sich lassen, denn für das Volk Rohans sind sie in besonderem Sinne ‚uneinholbar'. Entsprechend wird Théodens Ritt in die Schlacht von Tolkien wie folgt beschrieben:

> Théoden could not be overtaken. Fey he seemed, or *the battle-fury of his fathers* ran like new fire in his veins; and he was borne up on Snowmane *like a god of old*, even *as Oromë the Great* in the battle of the Valar *when the world was young*. (*Lord* 838)

Théoden steht hier in einer Kontinuität mit seinen Ahnen, mit den göttlichen Mächten, und schließlich mit dem Vala Oromë und dem Anfang der Welt selbst. Das Ereignis des in die Schlacht reitenden Oromë wiederholt sich und bestätigt somit den Ritt Théodens.

Besonders eindrückliche Arten der Unsterblichkeit sind mit dem letzten Kampf des Königs verbunden. Sein Pferd ist von einem Pfeil getroffen worden und hat ihn im Fallen unter sich begraben. Als eine Art Todesengel senkt sich der Herr der Nazgûl „like a falling cloud" (*Lord* 840) auf seinem namenlosen geflügelten Reittier herab. Dieses setzt sich auf den Kadaver des Pferds mit dem unter ihm liegenden König „digging in its claws". Wenn es je ein sinnfälliges Bild des unabänderlich nahenden Todes gegeben hat, dann ist es wohl dieses, und Tolkien beschreibt den Herrn der Nazgûl entsprechend: „bringing ruin, turning hope to despair, and victory to death. A great black mace he wielded" (840). Doch an diesem sprachlich eindrücklich geschilderten Nullpunkt der Hoffnung angesichts von Tod und Verzweiflung geschieht eine (durch ein die dunkle Szenerie verneinendes ‚aber' eingeleitete) Wendung. So ist die Verlorenheit an den unabänderlich drohenden Tod nicht das letzte Wort:

> But Théoden was not utterly forsaken. *The knights of his house lay slain about him*, or else mastered by the madness of their steeds were borne far away. *Yet one stood there still*: Dernhelm the young, faithful beyond fear; and he wept, for he had loved his lord as a father. (840)

Man weiß, wie diese Szene ausgeht, die es in ihrer Filmversion bis in die Unsterblichkeit eines Memes geschafft hat (‚I am no man'). Im Moment ist für unser Thema jedoch die Art von Unsterblichkeit interessanter, die sich diejenigen erwerben, die im Hintergrund an dieser Szene beteiligt sind und sich hier vor allem durch ihre Beziehung zum König auszeichnen – und die zum großen Teil bereits tot sind: die Ritter des königlichen Hauses inklusive ‚Dernhelm', dessen wahre Identität zu diesem Zeitpunkt noch nicht enthüllt ist. Ihre Erwähnung erschließt einen wichtigen literarischen Topos für die Erzählung, nämlich den der Treue des Gefolgsmanns zu seinem Herrn auch in hoffnungsloser Situation bis in den Tod. Es ist insbesondere diese Treue, die der Liebe zu den Eltern gleichkommt, ja sogar höher zu bewerten ist, die den Rittern des Königs ihre besondere Weise der Unsterblichkeit sichert. In der angelsächsischen Literatur hat insbesondere ein Werk dieses Thema aufgegriffen und zum zentralen Punkt der Darstellung gemacht: *The Battle of Maldon*.

Hier geht es (neben Beorthnoths ‚ofermod') vor allem um seine Gefährten, die sich entschließen, ihren Anführer Beorthnoth in hoffnungsloser Situation nicht zu verlassen und so ihre Treue bis in den Tod zu beweisen (vgl. Woolf 63-81).

Die Ritter des Königs haben also das geleistet, was jedenfalls die meisten der Gefolgsleute Beorthnoths auch getan haben. Ein sinnreiches Paradox kennzeichnet ihr Nachleben: sie werden unsterblich, weil sie die Forderungen des Gefolgschaftskodex (‚*comitatus* bond') erfüllt haben und im Kampf gestorben sind.[4] In der *Battle of Maldon* heißt es über einen Gefolgsmann des Anführers (in Tolkiens Prosafassung):

> Swiftly in that fight was then Offa hewn down, yet he had accomplished that which he promised to his lord, even as he had vowed before with regard to his patron, that they would both ride back to town safe to their homes or (together) fall in the host, and perish of their wounds upon the stricken field; he lay like a good knight close to his prince. (*Battle* 66)

Im Altenglischen lautet die letzte Zeile *he læg ðegenlice ðeodne gehende* – in der Übersetzung Mark Athertons: „he lay there in a thegnly manner close to his *theoden*" (62).[5] Beiden, der Gefolgschaft wie auch dem Anführer, verschafft die aufopfernde Treue Unsterblichkeit in der Erinnerung. Der neue König Éomer demonstriert diese Art des Nachlebens ebenso, als er den König und seine gefallenen Gefolgsleute findet:

> "Let his knights remain here", he said, "and bear his body in honour from the field, lest the battle ride over it! Yea, and all these other of the king's men that lie here". And he looked at the slain, *recalling their names.* (*Lord* 844)

Die Figur des ‚Dernhelm', der als einziger der Bedrohung standhält und seinem offiziell gefühlten, in der Tat aber auch wirklichen Blutsverwandten in verzweifelter Lage beisteht, steht ebenfalls in

4 Entsprechend auch ihr ehrendes vorläufiges Begräbnis: „But the men of the king's household they could not yet bring from the field; for seven of the king's knights had fallen there, and Déorwine their chief was among them. So they laid them apart from their foes and the fell beast and set spears about them" (*Lord* 845).

5 Laut Atherton unterstreicht der Begriff ‚theoden' im Gedicht die „purely secular relationship of a thegn or retainer to ‚his lord'" (86).

dieser, von der *Battle of Maldon* beschriebenen Tradition, hat aber gleichzeitig auch als ein Solitär des Beistandes eine Parallele im *Beowulf*, wo dessen Neffe Wiglaf dem alternden König als einziger von dessen schmählich geflohenen Gefolgsleuten in seinem letzten Kampf gegen den Drachen zu Hilfe kommt.

Unsterblichkeit definiert sich über wahre Gefolgschaft. In Rohan ist zudem das Königtum überhaupt Ausdruck und Mittel objektiver Unsterblichkeit. Der König ist als Nachfolger seiner Vorgänger und als Vorgänger seiner Nachfolger unsterblich: ‚Der König ist tot, es lebe der König!'. Eine entsprechende Szene verdeutlicht diesen Umstand, nämlich diejenige, als Imrahil von Dol Amroth dem Zug begegnet, der Théodens Leichnam vom Schlachtfeld in die Stadt bringt:

> "What burden do you bear, Men of Rohan?" he cried. "Théoden King" they answered. *He is dead. But Éomer King now rides in the battle*: he with the white crest in the wind. (*Lord* 845)

Zwar ist der vorherige Träger des Titels tot, sein Nachfolger hat jedoch Amt und Aufgabe übernommen, so dass eine die Sterblichkeit des Einzelnen überwindende Kontinuität hergestellt ist. Eine entsprechende Szene beschreibt Tolkien nach dem Ende des Ringkrieges, als der ‚Loremaster' Rohans alle Könige der Mark benennt und im Anschluss Éomer als neuer König begrüßt wird (977).

In Rohan im speziellen ist für die Träger des Königstitels diese Unsterblichkeit als Sukzession noch durch ihre signifikanten *Namen* unterstrichen, die den Eindruck hervorrufen, man habe es bei ihren Trägern nicht mit Personen, sondern mit dem (unsterblichen) Amt als solchem zu tun. Unsterblichkeit wird durch Entpersonalisierung erreicht. Besonders deutlich ist dies bei Théoden selbst. Im Altenglischen leitet sich das Wort *þeoden* von *þeod* her, welches Volk bedeutet, und ist somit als Name gleichzeitig Titel, nämlich ‚Führer des Volkes, König' – schon durch seinen Namen ist Théoden also unsterblich. Durch die Doppelung ‚König Théoden' = ‚König König' wird seine Funktion (über-)deutlich unterstrichen. Diese Übereinstimmung von Name und Amt ist in der Geschichte

Rohans keineswegs die Ausnahme.[6] Gleich Eorl, der Gründer des Reiches, trägt einen Namen, der Fürst (*earl*) bedeutet. Der zweite König heißt *Brego*, was mit Herrscher beziehunsgweise Herr übersetzt wird. Auch dessen Sohn *Aldor* trägt die Seniorität einer Königswürde im Namen. Der nächste König heißt *Fréa* – Bedeutung Herr (Lord) oder gar Der Herr. Es gibt noch einen *Brytta* (Geber), einen *Walda* (Herrscher); *Helm* bedeutet Schutz, Beschützer. Und trotz allem, was an Ungünstigem über Théodens Großvater *Fengel* berichtet wird, bedeutet dieser Name ebenfalls ‚Fürst, König'.

Die objektive Unsterblichkeit des Königtums ist nicht nur in Hinsicht auf die Namen der Könige gesichert, sondern noch weiter spezifiziert und mit emotionalen Bildern ausgestattet. Die Könige von Rohan sind qua Könige insgesamt Nachfolger von Eorl ‚dem Jungen', unter dessen sinnreich beleuchtetem Bild auf einem Wandteppich sie in ihrer ansonsten eher halbdunklen Halle sitzen:

> But upon one form the sunlight fell: a young man upon a white horse. He was blowing a great horn, and his yellow hair was flying in the wind. The horse's head was lifted, and its nostrils were wide and red as it neighed, smelling the battle afar. […] "Behold Eorl the Young!" said Aragorn. "Thus he rode out of the North to the Battle of the Field of Celebrant". (*Lord* 512)

Für Rohan und seinen König hat dieses Bild eine herausgehobene Bedeutung, und zwar als *formularisches Leitbild des Selbstverständnisses und des entsprechenden Verhaltens*. Die Könige dieser Halle stehen in der Tradition dieses immerjungen Reiters, der in der Not aus dem Norden den bedrängten Menschen im Süden zu Hilfe kommt. Das Wandgemälde drückt somit ein dauerhaft gültiges *Formular* des Verhaltens aus, in welches sich die einzelnen Könige einzuschreiben haben, und so die Geschichte konstituieren, durch die sie in der Nachwelt erinnert werden.

6 „The names of the kings of Rohan appear at first simply to be jokes or lighthearted usages of Old English words – an informed reader would doubtless recognize the fact that all, or almost all, of the kings are literally called king – but the semantic significance runs much deeper than it appears" (Silk 83). Silks Annahme ist korrekt, nicht zuletzt deshalb, weil die spezifische Namensgebung der Könige ihnen eine bestimmte Art entpersonalisierter Unsterblichkeit verleiht.

Ein signifikanter materieller Ausdruck objektiver Unsterblichkeit ist die Gräberreihe der Könige, die den Weg zur Hauptstadt und zur Königshalle selbst säumen. Als Grabhügel zeigen sie sowohl Vergänglichkeit als auch auf Dauer gestellte Erinnerung an, in deren beider Schatten jede Annäherung an das Zentrum Rohans liegt.

> At the foot of the walled hill the way ran under the shadow of many mounds, high and green. Upon their western sides the grass was white as with drifted snow: small flowers sprang there like countless stars amid the turf.
> "Look!" said Gandalf. "How fair are the bright eyes in the grass! Evermind they are called, *simbelmynë* in this land of Men, for they blossom in all the seasons of the year, and grow where dead men rest. Behold! We are come to the great barrows where the sires of Théoden sleep". (*Lord* 507)[7]

Diese Szenerie lebt vom Kontrast: Die Grabhügel der ‚dead men' selbst sind bedeckt von unscheinbaren, kleinen, immerblühenden, weißen Blumen, die den bezeichnenden elbischen Namen *Simbelmynë* tragen – übersetzbar mit ‚ewige Erinnerung' oder ‚Vergissmeinnicht' (vgl. Stoddard 151-60). Tom Shippey kommentiert diesen Umstand wie folgt: „Like the barrows it stands for the preservation of memory of ancient deeds and heroes in the expanse of years" (142). Es ist sicher kein Zufall, dass Tolkien gerade diese unspektakuläre Blume als Sinnbild für etwas gewählt hat, was man philosophisch als objektive Unsterblichkeit bezeichnen kann.

Der Beginn einer literarischen / poetischen Unsterblichkeit ist unter anderem in dem Lied festgehalten, das nach der Schlacht auf dem Pelennor gedichtet wird. Die Rohirrim sind ein bei jeder Ge-

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7 Eine entsprechende Stelle, in der der Tod als ewiger Schlaf dargestellt und die Sterblichkeit mit immanenten Mitteln negiert wird, ist die Aufbahrung Théodens in Minas Tirith nach der Schlacht auf dem Pelennor: „The light of the torches shimmered in his white hair like sun the spray of a fountain, but his face was fair and young, save that a peace lay on it beyond the reach of youth; and it seemed that he slept" (*Lord* 863). Das Begräbnis von Théodens Sohn und Erben und die Aussicht auf einen Bruch in der Linie von ‚rechtmäßigen' d.h. erbberechtigten Königen stellt eine starke Gefahr für die objektive Unsterblichkeit des gesamten Volkes dar. Noch gefährlicher für Rohans Unsterblichkeit ist daher der (von Schlangenzunge geförderte) Bruch zwischen Théoden und seinem Neffen Éomer.

legenheit singendes Volk, und der Gesang erfüllt viele Funktionen, nicht zuletzt die Produktion und Manifestation objektiver Unsterblichkeit in einem flüchtigen – das heißt nicht durch (Nieder-)schrift unterstützten – Medium. Die Lieder zu Théodens Ehren sind dafür das beste Beispiel, da sie den gegenwärtigen König mit dem ersten König verknüpfen. Hier wird das Formular des in einer gefährlichen Notlage zur Hilfe eilenden (und auch im Tode) siegreichen Königs fortgeschrieben:

> but the words of the song brought a light to the eyes of the folk of the Mark as *they heard again afar the thunder of the hooves of the North and the voice of Eorl* crying above the battle upon the field of Celebrant; and the tale of the kings rolled on, and the horn of Helm was loud in the mountains, until the Darkness came and King Théoden arose and rode through the Shadow to the fire, and died in splendour […].
> *Hope he rekindled, and in hope ended / Over death, over dread, over doom lifted / out of loss, out of life, unto long glory.* (*Lord* 976-77)

Auch Théodens eigene Vorstellungen von Unsterblichkeit sind von Konzepten geleitet, die die Unsterblichkeit als eine Kontinuität des Diesseitigen vorstellen. So spricht er von Tod als Schlaf[8] oder aber von seinem ehrenvollen Sitz bei Vätern in der Methalle ‘until the world is renewed’[9]: „I go to my fathers. And even in their mighty company, I shall not now be ashamed. I felled the black serpent“ (882-83).

Eine und wahrscheinlich die wichtigste Form objektiver Unsterblichkeit soll zum Schluss nicht unerwähnt bleiben: die persönliche, emotionale Erinnerung, in der eine Situation und eine Form des Verhaltens aktualisiert werden, die keinesfalls besonders spektakulär sein müssen: es kann auch um Unterhaltungen über das Rauchen gehen. Diese anrührendste und nachhaltigste Form objektiver Unsterblichkeit wird von Merry erlebt und schließlich praktiziert.

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8 Vgl. Éowyns Worte an den toten König auf dem Schlachtfeld aus *Fall of Théoden in the Battle of Osgiliath*: „‚Alas, Théoden son of Thengel‘, she said. ‚But you have turned the tide. See, they fly. The enemy is broken by fear. Never did an old Lord of Men die better. You shall sleep well, and no Shadow nor foul thing assail your bed‘“ (Tolkien, *War* 366).

9 Über die angelsächsische Vorstellung des Himmels als einer idealen Methalle vgl. Kabir 147-48.

In den Häusern der Heilung erinnert sich Merry an Théoden, als er nach seinem Erwachen eine Pfeife rauchen möchte. Dessen letzte Worte an Merry waren eine Segnung, die der Hobbit nun als einen Fluch empfindet: „Live now in blessedness; and when you sit in peace with your pipe, think of me!“ (*Lord* 843). Die Erinnerung droht das Vergnügen dauerhaft zu zerstören – wenn nicht ein Experte für Unsterblichkeit, dessen Herkunft auf Unsterbliche zurückgeht und der selbst schon das Totenreich durchschritten hat, die Situation umdeuten und in dauerhaftes Gutes verwandeln würde:

> [Merry:] “No, not a pipe. I don’t think I’ll smoke again. […] He is dead. It has brought it all back to me. He said he was sorry he had never had a chance to talk herb-lore with me. Almost the last thing he ever said. I shan’t ever be able to smoke again without thinking of him, and that day, Pippin, when he rode up to Isengard and was so polite”.
> “Smoke then, and think of him!” said Aragorn. “For he was a gentle heart and a great king and kept his oaths; and he rose out of the shadows to a last fair morning. Though your service to him was brief, it should be a memory glad and honorable to the end of your days”. (870)

Man kann davon ausgehen, dass Merry diesem guten Rat gefolgt ist und König Théoden so zu einer weiteren Form objektiver Unsterblichkeit verholfen hat. Der König wird emotionaler Teil einer von den Hobbits und insbesondere von Merry ausgeübten alltäglichen kulturellen Praxis.[10]

The Return of the King

In der Fantasy-Literatur sind Unsterblichkeit und Nachleben nicht zwangsläufig spektakulär und jenseits des in der Realität Vorstellbaren. Beschrieben werden auch andere, immanentere Formen des Nachlebens, die zu Unsterblichkeit führen können. Es sind jedoch gerade diese Formen, die nicht unerheblich zur ‚Stimmigkeit‘ der geschilderten Welt beitragen. Im *Lord* ist die Figur des Königs Théo-

10 Die Hobbits haben viel mit den Bewohnern Rohans gemeinsam, unter anderem ihr diesseitiges Verhältnis zur Unsterblichkeit. Diese ist zwar kulturübergreifend, d.h. solche religioiden Element gibt es in jedem Volk – bei der kulturellen Verwandtschaft zwischen dem Auenland und Rohan wird sie allerdings besonders deutlich.

den charakterisiert durch Phänomene objektiver Unsterblichkeit, ja geradezu ein Inbegriff dieser Art von kleiner Unsterblichkeit oder von immanentem Nachleben. Formen objektiver Unsterblichkeit, die im Text dargestellt werden, sind unter anderem mythische Bilder, Kontinuität des Amts beziehungsweise der gesellschaftlichen Funktion, vorbildliche Gefolgschaftstreue, Liedträchtigkeit, formularisches Verhalten, materielle Gedächtnisstätten und schließlich die emotionale persönliche Erinnerung anhand eines alltäglich wiederkehrenden Ereignisses.

Théoden kann sich somit in vielfältiger Weise seiner (objektiven) Unsterblichkeit sicher sein. Man könnte daher sogar meinen, der Titel des dritten Bandes von *Lord* sei nicht nur auf die übermenschliche Gestalt Aragorn/Elessar bezogen, sondern auch ein wenig auf den König von Rohan, Théoden, der in Form einer ‚kleinen' Unsterblichkeit auch und faktisch immer wieder zurückkehrt: *The Return of the King*.

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Langlebigkeit, Unsterblichkeit und Wiedergeburt in Mittelerde

Friedhelm Schneidewind

Langlebigkeit und Unsterblichkeit spielen in den Geschichten von J.R.R. Tolkien eine wesentliche Rolle, der Aspekt der Wiedergeburt hingegen taucht nur vereinzelt auf. Tolkiens Ausführungen zu diesen Themen in seinem zu Lebzeiten veröffentlichten Werk sind nicht sehr umfangreich. Die Konzepte von Sterblichkeit und Unsterblichkeit sind durchgehend und schlüssig, in seinen Texten zu Wiedergeburt, Körper und Seele hingegen gibt es vor allem in den später veröffentlichten Schriften Umbrüche und Widersprüche. In diesem Artikel werden Tolkiens Konzepte in ihrer Entwicklung vorgestellt und es wird aufgezeigt, warum sich diejenigen, die mehr als The Hobbit *und* The Lord of the Rings *lesen, entscheiden müssen, welche Teile von Tolkiens Werk sie für ihr Mittelerdebild heranziehen.*

Longevity and immortality play an important role in the stories of J.R.R. Tolkien, whereas the aspect of rebirth only appears sporadically. Tolkien's explanations of these themes in the works published during his lifetime are not very extensive. The concepts of mortality and immortality are consistent and coherent, whereas in his texts on rebirth, body and soul there are discontinuities and contradictions, especially in his later published writings. In this article, Tolkien's concepts are presented in their development, and it is demonstrated why those who read more than The Hobbit *and* The Lord of the Rings *will have to decide which parts of Tolkien's work they use for their personal image of Middle-earth.*

Einleitung

Zu den bei Fans und Fachleuten umstrittensten Änderungen in der filmischen Interpretation von *The Lord of the Rings* durch Peter Jackson gehört, dass und wie Arwen für Aragorn ihre ‚Unsterb-

lichkeit' aufgibt.[1] Nun sind die Ausführungen zu diesem Thema in Tolkiens zu Lebzeiten veröffentlichtem Werk wirklich nicht sehr umfangreich (dazu zähle ich *The Hobbit: Or There and Back Again*, 1937; *The Lord of the Rings*, 1954/55; und *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 1981).[2] Aber alles Wesentliche zu ‚Unsterblichkeit' und ‚Langlebigkeit' findet sich in *The Lord of the Rings*, vieles in den Appendices.[3]

Anders ist es mit Tolkiens Vorstellungen zu Wiedergeburt, Körper und Seele (bezogen natürlich stets auf Mittelerde, nicht auf unsere Primärwelt); hierzu finden wir im veröffentlichten Werk kaum etwas. Kein Wunder: Insbesondere bezüglich der Wiedergeburt gab es in Tolkiens Leben immer wieder geänderte Vorstellungen und Konzepte, Umbrüche und Widersprüche.

Tolkiens verschiedene Konzepte zu Sterblichkeit und Unsterblichkeit werden in der Folge erläutert, im Anschluss stelle ich die Entwicklungen und Konzepte zur Wiedergeburt chronologisch nach ihrer Entstehungszeit vor. Schließlich erläutere ich, warum sich zumindest die Leserinnen und Leser, die auch die von Christopher Tolkien herausgegebenen Bücher kennen, entscheiden müssen, welche Teile von Tolkiens Werk sie für ihr Mittelerdebild heranziehen.

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1 *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003). Regie Peter Jackson; Drehbuch Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson; Musik Howard Shore.

2 Die Briefe kann man in gewisser Hinsicht auch zum veröffentlichten Werk zählen, da sie, wenn auch (damals) nicht in Buchform, „nach außen" gingen, Tolkiens Aussagen darin also zumindest prinzipiell bekannt sein konnten. Das gilt zumindest für Briefe, die abgeschickt wurden; einige aussagekräftige Briefentwürfe, die in der Literatur immer wieder herangezogen werden, brachte Tolkien nie auf den Weg. Im Einzelfall muss man differenzieren zwischen Briefen an die Öffentlichkeit (Zeitschriften etc.), an Verleger, an die Familie, an Leserinnen und Leser sowie nicht abgeschickten Entwürfen. In diesem Artikel werden die englischen Ausgaben angeführt, die deutschen Übersetzungen sind im Literaturverzeichnis jedoch ebenfalls aufgeführt.

3 Für Tolkien waren die *Appendices* untrennbarer Bestandteil von *The Lord of the Rings*. Jahrelang versuchte er, seine Mythologie im *Silmarillion* gemeinsam mit dem Roman zu veröffentlichen. Da Jackson im Vorfeld mehrfach betonte, dass er Tolkiens ganzes Werk und die Briefe berücksichtigen wolle und die *History of Middle-earth* komplett gelesen habe, muss er Tolkiens Auffassung zur Langlebigkeit der Elben gekannt haben. Er hat sich demnach bewusst dagegen und für eine „Hollywood"-Lösung entschieden.

Sterblichkeit und „Unsterblichkeit“

Was wissen wir über die (Un)Sterblichkeit der ‚Kinder Ilúvatars‘, jener Wesen Mittelerdes, die direkt vom Einen Gott Eru/Ilúvatar geschaffen wurden, also der Elben und Menschen, wenn wir uns auf das zu Lebzeiten veröffentlichte Werk Tolkiens beschränken?

Elben sind prinzipiell ‚unsterblich‘. Sie sterben nur durch Gewalt oder Kümmernis (‚Weltmüdigkeit‘) – oder wie Lúthien, die als einzige Elbin ihre Unsterblichkeit aufgibt:

> But she chose mortality, and to die from the world, so that she might follow him [Beren]; and it is sung that they met again beyond the Sundering Seas, and after a brief time walking alive once more in the green woods, together they passed, long ago, beyond the confines of this world. So it is that Lúthien Tinúviel alone of the Elf-kindred has died indeed and left the world. (*Lord* 206)

In den *Appendices* erfahren wir, dass die Unsterblichkeit der Elben eine auf die Dauer der Welt beschränkte ist (was Tolkien später gerne als *Langlebigkeit* bezeichnet): „the immortality within the life of the world that was the fate of the Eldar“ (*Lord* 315).

Menschen sind sterblich. Es gibt aber sehr unterschiedliche Lebensspannen, wie wir z.B. an Aragorn sehen. In den *Appendices* steht, worauf dies zurückzuführen ist: Elros als Halbelbe entschied sich einst, Mensch zu werden,[4] und seine Nachfahren haben eine längere (wenn auch über die Generationen tendenziell abnehmende) Lebensdauer (*Lord* 315). Aufgrund der unterschiedlichen Erschaffung der Elben und Menschen sollte eigentlich eine fruchtbare Verbindung zwischen ihnen nicht möglich sein. Tolkien war sich dessen bewusst und verwandte deshalb für beide nur selten biologische Begriffe wie ‚race‘ (Rasse) oder ‚species‘ (Art), er schrieb lieber von ‚kindred‘ (Geschlecht). In mehreren Briefen, insbesondere 131 und 153, erklärt Tolkien, dass Elben und Menschen in biologischer Hinsicht eine Art seien und deshalb fruchtbare Nachkommen haben könnten. Mindestens drei Mal kam es zu entsprechenden Ver-

4 Zu den biologischen und genetischen Aspekten der Elben-Menschen-Beziehungen und den Auswirkungen auf die Nachfahren siehe Schneidewind, „Biologie, Genetik“ (48-49).

bindungen, die letzte war die zwischen Arwen und Aragorn. Die Nachfahren, die Halbelben, müssen sich zwischen Sterblichkeit und Unsterblichkeit entscheiden, das galt für Elrond und Elros und gilt für Elronds Kinder, insbesondere also auch für Arwen (*Lord* 343). Dass diese bis ganz zuletzt die Wahl hat, geht aus Aragorns Worten auf seinem Totenbett hervor: „The uttermost choice is before you: to repent and go to the Havens […]; or else to abide the Doom of Men" (*Lord* 343).

In seinen Briefen geht Tolkien auf die Thematik ausführlicher ein. Er unterscheidet 1958 in Brief 212 zwischen der „echten" Unsterblichkeit der „Götter", der Valar und Maiar,[5] und der begrenzten der Elben, der „Langlebigkeit":

> In this mythical "prehistory" *immortality*, strictly longevity co-extensive with the life of Arda, was part of the given nature of the Elves; beyond the End nothing was revealed. *Mortality*, that is a short life-span having no relation to the life of Arda, is spoken of as the given nature of Men. (*Letters* 285; originale Hervorhebung)

Tolkien erläutert 1954 in Brief 153 auch die unterschiedliche Lebensspanne der Menschen genauer: „Elros chose to be a King and 'longaevus' but mortal, so all his descendants are mortal, and of a specially noble race, but with dwindling longevity" (*Letters* 193).[6] Im Gegensatz zu dieser angeborenen, genetisch bedingten Langlebigkeit, handelt es sich bei jener der Ringträger um eine Ausweitung der individuell möglichen Lebensspanne, nicht um eine prinzipielle Änderung.

Tolkien erläuterte schon vor dem Erscheinen von *The Lord of the Rings* 1951 in einer Fußnote in Brief 131, „that each 'Kind' has a natural span, integral to its biological and spiritual nature. This cannot really be increased qualitatively or quantitatively; so that prolongation in time is like stretching a wire out ever tauter, or 'spreading butter ever thinner' – it becomes an intolerable torment" (*Letters* 155). Eine Verlängerung der natürlichen Lebensspanne kann es nur in ganz wenigen Ausnahmen geben, wie bei Gollum und Bilbo

5 Zur Fragwürdigkeit dieser Differenzierung, die u.a. Sauron und Saruman außer Acht lässt, siehe Schneidewind: „Biologie, Abstammung" (52-55).

6 Zu den biologischen Grundlagen siehe Schneidewind, „Biologie, Genetik" (63).

durch den enorm mächtigen Herrscherring. Aber selbst dieser kann die Lebensspanne nur „strecken“. Dies wird in Bilbos Klage deutlich: „I feel all thin, sort of stretched, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much bread“ (*Lord* 41).

Die grundlegende Eigenschaft „Sterblichkeit“ können selbst die Valar nicht verändern, dies bedarf jeweils eines Eingriffes durch Ilúvatar. Da Sauron den Númenórern etwas Anderes vormacht, greifen diese die Unsterblichen Lande an in der falschen Hoffnung, dort unsterblich zu werden. Doch war ihr Angriff von vornherein umsonst: Das Land ändert nichts an der Sterblichkeit seiner Besucher. Auch Frodo, Gimli und die anderen, die nach dem Ringkrieg nach Valinor reisen, werden dort irgendwann sterben, wie Tolkien 1954 in Brief 153 deutlich macht:

> I have said nothing about it in this book, but the mythical idea underlying is that for mortals, since their “kind” cannot be changed for ever, this is strictly only a temporary reward: a healing and redress of suffering. They cannot abide for ever, and though they cannot return to mortal earth, they can and will “die” – of free will, and leave the world. (*Letters* 198-99)

Nur zwei Ausnahmen gibt es laut Brief 153 bei den Kindern Ilúvatars:

> Immortality and Mortality being the special gifts of God to the *Eruhini* (in whose conception and creation the Valar had no part at all) it must be assumed that no alteration of their fundamental kind could be effected by the Valar even in one case: the cases of Lúthien (and Túor) and the position of their descendants was a direct act of God. (*Letters* 194)

Anders bei den Halbelben: „The Half-elven, such as Elrond and Arwen, can choose to which kind and fate they shall belong: choose once and for all. […] the Halfelven have a power of (irrevocable) choice, which may be delayed but not permanently, which kin’s fate they will share“ (*Letters* 193). Wie Tolkien 1972 in Brief 345 klar werden lässt, können sie sich aber Zeit lassen, wie Arwen, die erst nach Aragorns Tod beschloss, als Mensch zu altern und zu sterben: „Arwen was not an elf, but one of the half-elven who abandoned her elvish rights“ (*Letters* 423).

Wiedergeburt

In *The Hobbit* und *The Lord of the Rings* erfahren wir, dass die Zwerge an die Wiedergeburt ihres Ahnherren Durin glauben (*Lord* 352). Ob dies aber mehr ist als eine Legende, die sich um die Ähnlichkeit der Nachfahren rankt, lässt Tolkien offen, erst um 1972/73 bestätigt er dieses Konzept.[7] Oft wird Gandalfs Aussage über Glorfindel so interpretiert, als sei dieser wiedergeboren:[8] „Yes, you saw him for a moment as he is upon the other side: one of the mighty of the Firstborn. He is an Elf-lord of a house of princes" (*Lord* 235). Solche Interpretationen sind aber erst entstanden, nachdem *The History of Middle-earth* erschienen war. Beim Schreiben von *The Lord of the Rings* ging Tolkien von zwei verschiedenen Elben namens Glorfindel aus. In den Briefen gibt es zum Thema Wiedergeburt der Elben Äußerungen Tolkiens nur in nicht abgeschickten Entwürfen, so zum Beispiel in Brief 181 von 1956: „When 'killed', by the injury or destruction of their incarnate form, they do not escape from time, but remain in the world, either discarnate, or being reborn" (*Letters* 235). Zwei Jahre später bekräftigt Tolkien: „they were rehabilitated and reborn and eventually recovered memory of all their past: they remained 'identical'" (*Letters* 286).

Es mag sein, dass Tolkien seine Ideen zur Wiedergeburt nicht veröffentlichen wollte. Zumindest war er sich der Problematik des Konzeptes für einen gläubigen Katholiken bewusst, wie er bereits 1954 in einem Entwurf zu einem (nicht abgeschickten) Brief klarstellt. Dieser Brief, Nummer 153, ist die Antwort auf ein Schreiben von Peter Hastings, Leiter einer katholischen Buchhandlung, der die Idee der Wiedergeburt, nachdem Tolkien ihm davon erzählt hatte, wie folgt kritisierte:

7 Siehe den Abschnitt „Elbenfürst und Zwergenkönig: Späte Schriften" im Folgenden.
8 Die Diskussion darüber wird ausführlich dargestellt in der ARDAPEDIA: https://www.ardapedia.org/wiki/Glorfindel#Problematik (eingesehen am 3. Januar 2025).

> God has not used that device in any of the creations of which we have knowledge, and it seems to me to be stepping beyond the position of a sub-creator to produce it as an actual working thing, because a sub-creator, when dealing with the relations between creator and created, should use those channels which he knows the creator to have used already. (*Letters* 187)

Tolkien ließ offen, ob er in unserer Primärwelt an die Reinkarnation glaubt; ich halte es aufgrund seines katholischen Glaubens für unwahrscheinlich.[9] Er hat auf jeden Fall auch in dieser Sache Primär- und Sekundärwelt sauber auseinandergehalten, wie er im gleichen Briefentwurf thematisiert:

> "Reincarnation" may be bad theology (that surely, rather than metaphysics) as applied to Humanity […] But I do not see how even in the Primary World any theologian or philosopher, unless very much better informed about the relation of spirit and body than I believe anyone to be, could deny the *possibility* of re-incarnation as a mode of existence, prescribed for certain kinds of rational incarnate creatures. (*Letters* 189)

Dass die Idee in Mittelerde Probleme mit sich brächte, räumte Tolkien immer wieder ein, etwa bei seinen Überlegungen zur Entstehung der Orks aus Elben. Er entwickelte im Lauf der Zeit sehr unterschiedliche Thesen, wie die Orks entstanden sein könnten: Mal stammten sie von Menschen und Elben ab (vgl. z. B. *Morgoth's Ring* 406, 414, 416), mal heißt es „Orcs are not Elvish" (*Morgoth's Ring* 409), dann wieder, sie stammten von Elben ab (*Morgoth's Ring* 411, 413). Letztere Vorstellungen finden sich auch im *Silmarillion*. Doch wenn Orks von Elben abstammen, bekommt Tolkien ein doppeltes „Seelenproblem": Wo sollen die Seelen für die ganzen Orks herkommen, und vor allem: Wo sollen sie hin? Es wird nichts davon berichtet, dass Manwes Hallen voller Ork-Seelen seien. Oder haben Orks keine Seele, anders als die Elben? Wie und wann kommt es dazu? Diese Fragen hat Tolkien nie beantwortet, zumindest finden wir dazu nichts in seinen Unterlagen. Und er konnte sich wohl auch

9 Die großen christlichen Kirchen lehnen den Reinkarnationsglauben ab. In der katholischen Theologie wird kategorisch die These vertreten, dass aufgrund von Konzilsbeschlüssen und klarer Aussagen des Lehramtes katholischer Glaube und Reinkarnationsidee auf keinen Fall zur Deckung zu bringen sind (vgl. Adler und Aichelin).

nie für eine Abstammungsvariante entscheiden (vgl. Schneidewind, „Biologie, Genetik“ 54).

Frühe Ideen

In der 1918/20 entstandenen *Music of the Ainur* sterben die Elben so wie später in *The Lord of the Rings* und *The Silmarillion* nur durch Gewalt oder durch Kummer. Sie werden aber in ihren Kindern wiedergeboren – eine clevere Art der Bevölkerungskontrolle. Denn die Zahl der Elben bleibt so immer gleich. In anderen Texten aus jener Zeit finden sich ähnliche Vorstellungen; sie variieren vor allem darin, wie lange es dauert bis zur Zeit der Wiedergeburt und wer von den Valar über diese Wartezeit entscheidet. Diese und ähnliche frühe Ideen widersprechen nicht nur in vielen Punkten Tolkiens veröffentlichten Romanen, sondern auch seinen späteren Vorstellungen. Deren Entwicklung erstreckt sich immerhin über einen Zeitraum von mehr als 50 Jahren und ist selten konsistent – und das Meiste war ja auch nie für eine Veröffentlichung bestimmt. Einmal finden wir sogar eine Konzeption, die bezüglich der Menschen der späteren Mythologie zutiefst widerspricht und später wieder verworfen wurde; hier werden die Menschen nach ihrem Verdienst eingeteilt. Da diese Passage auch die Ähnlichkeit zu den die Elben betreffenden Konzeptionen zeigt, wird sie hier ausführlicher zitiert:

> Mandos and his wife Nienna […] they are named “Fantur of Death, Vefantur Mandos” and “Fui Nienna”, “mistress of death”. […] Most important in the passage concerning Mandos is the clear statement about the fate of Elves who die: that they wait in the halls of Mandos until Vefantur decrees their release, to be reborn in their own children. This latter idea has already appeared in the tale of *The Music of the Ainur*, and it remained my father’s unchanged conception of Elvish “immortality” for many years; indeed the idea that the Elves might die only from the wounds of weapons or from grief was never changed […]

> With the account of Fui Nienna, however, we come upon ideas in deep contradiction to the central thought of the later mythology […] Here we learn that Nienna is the judge of Men in her halls named Fui after her own name; and some she keeps in the region of Mandos (where is her hall), while the greater number board the black ship Mornie – which does no more than ferry these dead down the coast to Arvalin, where they wander in the dusk until the end of the world. But yet others are driven forth to be seized by Melko and taken to endure 'evil days' in Angamandi (in what sense are they dead, or mortal?); and (most extraordinary of all) there are a very few who go to dwell among the Gods in Valinor. We are far away here from the Gift of Iluvatar, whereby Men are not bound to the world, but leave it, none know where; and this is the true meaning of Death […]: the final and inescapable exit. (*Lost Tales* 89-90)

Einige Jahre später finden wir in *The Earliest Silmarillion* (1926/30) eine ähnliche Konzeption bezüglich der Elben: Nach ihrem „Tod" warten sie in den Hallen von Mandos. „Slain or fading their spirits went back to the halls of Mandos to wait a thousand years, or the pleasure of Mandos according to their deserts, before they were recalled to free life in Valinor, or were reborn, it is said, into their own children" (Tolkien, „Shaping" 100). Die Wiedergeburt ist also eine Alternative zum „freien Leben" in Valinor; letzteres ist eine ganz andere Idee als später das Warten in Mandos' Hallen und wurde von Tolkien nie weiter ausgeführt. Eine Anmerkung zeigt Tolkiens Unentschlossenheit, ob nun die Zahl der Elben wachsen sollte oder nicht, alle wiederkehren sollten oder nicht; er änderte oft seine Meinung, aber immer noch waren es ihre Kinder, in denen die Elben wiedergeboren wurden.

Während der Entstehungszeit von *The Lord of the Rings* war Tolkien sich noch über vieles im Zusammenhang mit dem Konzept der Wiedergeburt unklar. Erst in den späten 1950er-Jahren, als *The Lord of the Rings* schon einige Jahre auf dem Markt war, erarbeitete er sich eine einigermaßen klare, wenn auch in manchen Punkten abweichende, Konzeption. Diese schlägt sich nieder in zwei Werken: „Laws and Customs among the Eldar" (späte 1950er, *Morgoth's Ring* 207-53) und „Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth" (wohl 1959, *Morgoth's Ring* 301-66), die die Grundlage der folgenden Betrachtung bilden.

Gesetze und Bräuche bei den Elben

In den „Laws and Customs among the Eldar" erfahren wir, kurz zusammengefasst: Am Anfang, nach ihrem Erwachen, wussten die Elben nichts von ihrem Schicksal, sie erfuhren es erst in Aman von den Valar; vorher dachten sie, der Tod sei endgültig. Nun lernten sie, dass ein Elbe oder eine Elbin bei der Geburt direkt von Eru, von außerhalb von Ea, einen neuen *fëa* erhält (was ungefähr dem Geist oder der Seele entspricht), der sich mit dem *hroa* (auch *hrondo*, entspricht dem Körper) verbindet.

Elbenkinder altern langsamer als Menschenkinder; mit 50 bis 100 Jahren sind Elben erwachsen. Sie heiraten in der Regel früh und nur einmal und bekommen bald Kinder.[10] Der *fëa* des Kindes wird im Mutterleib durch den Geist beider Eltern „gepflegt" und „genährt"; dies ist ebenso wichtig wie physische Nahrung. Deshalb versuchen sie, jede Trennung zu vermeiden, und bekommen keine Kinder in Gefahren- oder Kriegszeiten. Elben können anderen Elben ansehen, ob diese verheiratet sind oder nicht. Ehebruch gibt es nicht, und eine Vergewaltigung durch einen Elben würde eine Elbin nicht überleben.[11]

Der *fëa* ist unzerstörbar, er bleibt nach Zerstörung des *hroa* in Arda und geht in die Hallen von Mandos ein. Solche „unbehausten" (*houseless*, *exiled*) *fëar* können in einem neuen Körper wiedergeboren werden – aber nur freiwillig, nach einer Wartezeit nach dem Willen der Valar, und nur mit Erus Erlaubnis. Es handelt sich also um einen Gnadenakt. Die Wiedergeburt erfolgt als Kind durch eine neue Geburt, im selben Geschlecht, manchmal sogar bei den eigenen (Erst-)Eltern. Die zweite Kindheit, während der langsam die Erinnerung an das erste Leben wächst, bringt durch die doppelte Erinnerung mehr Erfahrung, Wissen und Weisheit: „double joy of childhood, and also an experience and knowledge greater than the

10 In *The Lord of the Rings* und in *The Silmarillion* lernen wir hauptsächlich Elben kennen, die sich nicht an diese Regel halten: Arwen ist bei ihrer Heirat 3.019 Jahre alt, Legolas seit Jahrhunderten unverheiratet, Galadriel hat spät geheiratet und Finrod hat eine Geliebte, die er in Aman zurücklässt.

11 Durch andere Wesen schon, wie das Beispiel von Elronds Frau Celebrían zeigt, die von Orks missbraucht wird – und über andere geschlechtliche Konstellationen, etwa gleichgeschlechtliche Liebe oder gleichgeschlechtlichen Missbrauch, schreibt Tolkien nichts.

years of the body“ (*Morgoth's Ring* 221). Insgesamt sind die Wiedergeborenen bevorzugt und haben mehr Freude:

> For the Re-born are twice nourished, and twice parented, and have two memories […] Their life is, therefore, as if a year had two springs and though an untimely frost followed after the first, the second spring and all the summer after were fairer and more blessed. (*Morgoth's Ring* 222)

Welch ein poetisches Bild!

Eine Wiedergeburt ist unmöglich, wenn der Partner oder die Partnerin wieder verheiratet ist; die ausführlich dargestellte Diskussion um Finwe und Miriel führt deshalb zu speziellen Regeln in einem solchen Fall (vgl. *Morgoth's Ring* 254-70). „Unbehauste“ *fëar*, die den Ruf von Mandos ablehnen, können als Geister bzw. Gespenster zu einer Gefahr werden, wenn sie andere Elben zu beherrschen oder ihren *hroa* zu übernehmen suchen (Besessenheit). Solche *fëar* können von Nekromanten kontrolliert und in ihren Dienst gezwungen werden; die gefährlichsten Nekromanten waren Melkor und Sauron. Diese Ideen und Konzepte über die Elben haben wenig zu tun mit dem, was wir in *The Lord of the Rings* und in *The Silmarillion* vorfinden, ja sie widersprechen den Konzepten dort teilweise. Was ist denn noch besonders tapfer an den „heldenhaften“ Kämpfern der Elben, wenn diese wissen, dass sie sicher bald wiederkommen?

Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth

Bei diesem ausführlichen Diskurs zwischen dem Elbenfürsten Finrod Felagund und der weisen Menschenfrau Andreth geht es um das Schicksal von Elben und Menschen, um Tod, Wiedergeburt und Hoffnung. Andreth gibt alte Überlieferungen ihres Volkes wieder, die den bekannten Konzepten von Sterblichkeit/Unsterblichkeit und Wiedergeburt widersprechen: Auch die Menschen seien einst unsterblich gewesen (beziehungsweise langlebig bis zum Ende von Arda); sie hätten sich aber mit Melkor eingelassen, und ihre Sterblichkeit sei die Strafe Erus wegen des Abfalls von ihm und für die Verehrung Melkors. Finrod ist bereit, einzuräumen, dass

an der menschlichen Überlieferung etwas dran sein könnte. Dann scheinen ihm zwei Schlussfolgerungen möglich, zwei ‚Synthesen' aus den unterschiedlichen Konzepten. Möglicherweise seien die Menschen einst potenziell unsterblich gewesen: Erus Gabe, „the Gift of Ilúvatar", sei die Freiheit der Menschen, Arda auf Wunsch zu verlassen – mit *hroa* und *fëa*, als ganze, heile Wesen. Die Strafe Ilúvatars sei die „unnatürliche" Trennung von *hroa* und *fëa* beim Sterben, ein „unnatural state" unter Zurücklassung des Körpers.

Finrods zweite Überlegung eröffnet den Elben (!) neue Hoffnung: Wenn die Überlieferung der Menschen stimmen sollte, dass dereinst der *fëa* des Menschen seinen Körper wieder mitnehmen könne aus Arda, sobald Arda vom Einfluss Melkors befreit werde, dann werde Arda vielleicht auch von anderen bekannten Einschränkungen befreit, und es entstehe etwas Neues: nicht die alte, ‚verderbte' Welt, sondern eine bessere, geheilte: „Arda Healed shall not be Arda Unmarred, but a third thing and a greater" (*Morgoth's Ring* 318). Und dann könnten wahrscheinlich auch die Elben weiter existieren, über das ihnen bestimmte Ende von Arda hinaus.

Tolkien war beim Schreiben der *Athrabeth* 67 Jahre alt und schon im Ruhestand – ab Sommer 1959 – oder kurz davor. Daher verwundert es nicht, dass das Werk hoffnungsvoll und in mehrfacher Hinsicht versöhnlich angelegt ist. Tolkien gibt den Elben neue Hoffnung, er söhnt sich und seinen christlichen Glauben aus mit deren eher nordisch-heidnischem Schicksal, und er verbindet seine alte Idee der zweiten Musik der Ainur mit der christlichen Vision von einem neuen Himmel und einer neuen Erde.

Elbenfürst und Zwergenkönig: Späte Schriften

Die im letzten Band der *History of Middle-Earth* versammelten späten Schriften sind etwas problematisch, wie auch Christopher Tolkien einräumt, der manchmal „clear evidences of confusion" (*Peoples* 377) erkennt. Dies sollte niemanden verwundern, sind diese Texte doch zum großen Teil in den letzten Monaten vor Tolkiens Tod entstanden – und ein Mann von 80 Jahren hat jedes Recht, zu erklären, „my memory is no longer retentive" (*Peoples* 377).

An zwei Punkten nimmt Tolkien jedoch wesentliche Änderungen vor: bei den Zwergen und bei Glorfindel. Bei der Wiederkunft von Durin geht er nun von einer ‚echten' Wiedergeburt aus und notiert hierzu zwei Möglichkeiten: Es handele sich beim Wiedererscheinen von Durin entweder um eine Wiedergeburt im neuen Körper, in dem die Erinnerungen vorhanden seien, oder aber um eine Wiederbelebung des Körpers, zu dem der Geist zurückkehre, eben keine „rebirth, but of the preservation of the body of a former King Durin (say) to which at intervals his spirit would return" (*Peoples* 383-84). Mehr erfahren wir nicht über Tolkiens Versuch, sein Wiedergeburts-Konzept für die Zwerge anzupassen.

Der Fall Glorfindel ist verzwickt, und auch Christopher Tolkien sieht keine klare Linie. Während der Entstehung des *Lord of the Rings* ging Tolkien davon aus, dass es zwei Glorfindels gab: den im Kampf gegen den Balrog gefallenen Elbenfürsten aus Gondolin und den Glorfindel, den Frodo in Bruchtal kennenlernt. 32 Jahre später ist er zum Schluss gekommen, dass dies nicht sein könne, da zwei Elben niemals denselben Namen haben könnten.[12]

Ohne dass wir wissen, warum, verwirft Tolkien die Idee der Wiedergeburt als Neugeborenes („re-birth") als falsch beziehungsweise erklärt sie zu einer falschen Überlieferung: „noted as a false notion, probably of Mannish origin" (*Peoples* 390). Nun wird die „reincarnation" im Sinne von Wiederherstellung des Körpers zu einem *Recht* (zumindest einiger) Elben, denn es ist „duty of the Valar to restore them […] to incarnate life, if they desired it" (*Peoples* 378).[13] Nach Vergebung der Rebellion gegen die Valar, an der er

12 Diese Frage ist eine der ungeklärten Kontroversen, mit denen man Tolkien-Fachleute in hitzige Debatten verwickeln kann. Zumindest bei Elben und Menschen hat Tolkien dies toleriert. Beispiele: Haldir aus Lothlórien (der im Film eine große Bedeutung erlangt) und Haldir, Sohn von Halmir von Brethil, Führer der Haladin; Haleth, der älteste Sohn von König Helm Hammerhand, aber auch eine gewählte Führerin der Haladin im Ersten Zeitalter; Beleg, als Beleg Cúthalion, der berühmteste elbische Bogenschütze, und als Beleg I. der zweite König von Arthedain, Vorfahr von Aragorn.

13 Im Deutschen wie im ‚normalen' Englisch gibt es diesen Unterschied sprachlich nicht in dieser Eindeutigkeit – wahrscheinlich, weil die meisten Reinkarnations-Vorstellungen eine Wiedergeburt im Sinne von „rebirth" vorsehen. So schreibt Reinhart Hummel bereits 1983: „Als christliche Alternative zur reinkarnatorisch verstandenen Wiedergeburt muß die als Neuschöpfung verstandene Wiedergeburt herausgestellt werden" (77). Und Reinhard Hempelmann stellt 2000 fest: „Es kann davon ausgegangen werden, dass ca. ein Fünftel der Europäer Zustimmung und Sympathie im Blick auf Reinkarnation bzw. ‚Wiedergeburt' bekunden [...] für ein ‚eschatologisches

beteiligt war, wird Glorfindel „released from Mandos and became himself again" (*Peoples* 378) – eher eine „Wiederauferstehung" oder „Wiederherstellung" als eine Wieder-„Geburt".

Es gibt außerdem zwei Texte über Glorfindel mit verschiedenen Thesen. In der ersten Variante reist Glorfindel um das Jahr 1000 des Dritten Zeitalters mit den Istari nach Mittelerde, als besonderer Freund von Olorin/Gandalf (*Peoples* 376). Für wahrscheinlicher hielt Tolkien allerdings Glorfindels Rückkehr nach Mittelerde im Zweiten Zeitalter, vor Númenors Untergang und der Wandlung der Welt, eventuell sogar schon vor dem Schmieden der Ringe, um den Kampf der Istari gegen Sauron vorzubereiten (*Peoples* 380). Laut dem *Silmarillion* wussten allerdings von den Elben nur Galadriel, Elrond und Círdan um Gandalfs Herkunft und Macht; nun müsste Glorfindel auch Bescheid wissen. Ebenfalls laut dem *Silmarillion* sind die Istari die einzigen Gesandten, über die die Valar Einfluss nehmen in Mittelerde; nun gehörte Glorfindel auch dazu. Wieso hält er sich dann aber im Ringkrieg so zurück? Diese Widersprüche lassen sich nicht auflösen.

Schlussfolgerungen

Für unser Bild von Mittelerde müssen wir uns entscheiden, ob wir nur das zu Lebzeiten veröffentlichte Werk heranziehen, ob wir auch das *Silmarillion* und/oder die *Letters* berücksichtigen und ob und wieweit die große Zettelsammlung *History of Middle-Earth*. Jede dieser Entscheidungen ist legitim.

Bezüglich der ‚Unsterblichkeit' der Elben und der Sterblichkeit verfolgt Tolkien über die Jahre hinweg (mit Ausnahme der *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth*) ein klares Konzept, das zudem auch naturwissenschaftlich erklärbar ist, über die Mythologie hinaus (vgl. Schneidewind, „Biologie, Genetik" 62-63). Auch die Sonderstellung der Halbelben und die Geschichten von Lúthien und Arwen sind schlüssig und ziemlich durchgängig, und beides ist auch im veröffentlichten Werk zu finden.

Konzept', das unter den Begrifflichkeiten ‚Reinkarnation', ‚Wiedergeburt', ‚Seelenwanderung' zusammengefasst wird" (105).

Die Konzepte von Tolkien zur ‚Wiedergeburt' sind widersprüchlich und wechselnd, bringen Probleme mit sich und tauchen nicht im veröffentlichten Werk auf. Um nicht viele der Taten in *The Lord of the Rings* und vor allem im *Silmarillion* neu bewerten zu müssen, ist es sinnvoll, diese Konzepte in einem schlüssigen Mittelerdebild nicht zu berücksichtigen. Was riskiert Finrod, wenn er sich für Beren opfert, was Fingolfin, wenn er gegen Melkor antritt, wenn beide *wissen*, dass sie irgendwann wiederkommen werden? (Mal ganz abgesehen von den Problemen, die dies für die Thronfolge mit sich bringen würde!) Und der ‚Sündenfall' der Elben, der Sippenmord von Alqualonde, würde erheblich an Bedeutung verlieren und könnte kaum die beschriebenen dramatischen Folgen nach sich ziehen. Schließlich taucht die Wiedergeburtsidee bei Tolkien früh auf, aber er hat sie nie in sein veröffentlichtes Werk aufgenommen.[14]

Ich sehe in den verstärkten Bemühungen Tolkiens ab den späten 1950er-Jahren, die Mythologie mit seinem christlichen Gedankengut in Übereinstimmung zu bringen, den Versuch, im Herbst seines Lebens sich und sein Werk mit seinem Glauben auszusöhnen.[15] In einer so späten Lebensphase ist der Versuch nur allzu verständlich, eine Übereinstimmung zwischen eigenem Werk und Glauben herzustellen. Doch ist es unsere Entscheidung, wie weit wir Tolkien dabei folgen.

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14 Das Argument, es müsse zählen, was ein Autor *zuletzt* zu seinem Werk gesagt oder geschrieben habe, akzeptiere ich nicht. Zunächst wissen wir nicht, was Tolkiens letzte Meinung war. (Vielleicht hat er kurz vor seinem Tod alles zur Wiedergeburt auf einem Butterbrotpapier, das nie gefunden wurde, widerrufen! Und nicht alles, was man aufschreibt, ist ernst gemeint, es mag nur Gedankenspielerei sein, bald wieder verworfen werden.) Speziell im Fall der *History of Middle-earth* können wir dies häufig nicht bewerten; hinzukommt, dass wir es mit einer Auswahl und Bearbeitung durch einen Dritten zu tun haben. Unabhängig von diesen Argumenten gilt: Mit einer Veröffentlichung ist ein Werk der Interpretation durch alle Rezipierenden frei gegeben; der Autor mag erläutern, was er meinte, aber wenn es ihm nicht gelungen ist, dies in seinem Werk zu verdeutlichen, ist seine Interpretation prinzipiell nicht mehr wert als jede andere – es sei denn, er überarbeitet sein Werk! Tolkien hat in *The Lord of the Rings* nie die Wiedergeburt eingebaut, also steht es uns frei, sie zu ignorieren.

15 Nach dem diesem Artikel zu Grunde liegenden Vortrag wurde im Publikum der Begriff ‚Restauration' laut, den ich für zutreffend halte. Als historischer Fachbegriff bezieht sich Restauration auf die Wiederherstellung eines (politischen) Zustandes, der im Zuge einer Revolution oder Reform beseitigt worden war, oder die Wiederherstellung einer legitimen Herrschaftsform. Auch wenn man Tolkiens Mythologie nicht als revolutionär begreift, passt der Begriff doch auf seine späten Versuche, diese seiner primärweltlichen ‚Herrschaftsform', seinem Glauben, anzupassen.

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"Unless a Grain of Wheat Falls into the Earth…": Death and Rebirth in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Anne-Frédérique Mochel-Caballero

C.S. Lewis was deeply inspired by the Biblical metaphor of the dying seed. He mentions it in almost all his works, including The Chronicles of Narnia *(1950–1956). He sees an ethical dimension in it, as he considers the necessity of agreeing to lose before gaining. He also associates it with the Christian concept of felix culpa, which implies that what comes after is better than what was before. Moreover, Lewis views this metaphor as a universal principle, a downward and upward movement present in nature, as well as in human systems of thought and in the Biblical narrative.*

C.S. Lewis war von der biblischen Metapher des sterbenden Korns zutiefst inspiriert. Er erwähnt sie in fast allen seinen Werken, auch in den Chroniken von Narnia *(1950-1956). Er sieht darin eine ethische Dimension, da er die Notwendigkeit erkennt, erst zu verlieren und dann zu gewinnen. Er bringt diese Notwendigkeit auch mit dem christlichen Konzept der felix culpa in Verbindung, das besagt, dass das, was noch kommen wird, besser ist als das, was vorher war. Darüber hinaus betrachtet Lewis diese Metapher als ein universelles Prinzip, eine Abwärts- und Aufwärtsbewegung, die sowohl in der Natur als auch in menschlichen Denksystemen und in der biblischen Erzählung vorkommt.*

Introduction

Long before becoming a Christian, C.S. Lewis was fascinated by the "myth of the dying god" which draws inspiration from the natural process of a seed being put into the earth and reappearing in the form of a plant. He loved the stories of gods like Balder, Adonis, and Osiris dying and being re-born in Norse, Greek, and Egyptian mythology. Eventually, his friend Tolkien convinced Lewis that Christianity was actually myth become fact (Green and Hooper 116), in that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were the

historical events foreshadowed in the world's mythologies ("Myth" 141; *Joy* 189). From that moment on, Lewis never ceased to be inspired by the agricultural metaphor of the dying seed referred to by Jesus in the Gospel of John: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Lewis mentions this metaphor in one form or another in almost all his works, his essays ("The Grand Miracle"; "Is Theology Poetry?"; "Myth Became Fact"; "First and Second Things"; "The Inner Ring"), his books on apologetics (*The Problem of Pain*; *Miracles*) and his fiction (*The Pilgrim's Regress*; *The Great Divorce*; *The Screwtape Letters*; *The Space Trilogy*; *Till We Have Faces*), including *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The metaphor of the dying seed has multiple meanings for Lewis. He sees an ethical dimension in it, as it makes him reflect on the dangers of clinging to something that one does not want to give up. Moreover, he associates the fact that the plant which germinates is much more accomplished than the seed from which it originated with the Christian concept of *felix culpa*, which largely inspires his fiction. He also sees it as a "key principle" (*Miracles* 116), a downward and upward movement present in nature, but also in human systems of thought and in the Biblical narrative.

An Ethical Dimension: To Give up Before Receiving

The first word of the Biblical verse, "unless", suggests the necessity of dying before living again, of losing before gaining, of giving up before receiving. Jesus Christ alludes to this in the Gospel of Luke when he claims: "Give, and it will be given to you. […] For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38). In the Old Testament, the author of the Book of Proverbs refers to a similar idea: "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered" (Prov. 11:24–25).

The same principle is illustrated in John's version of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, a miracle of multiplying fish and bread which Jesus performed to feed a hungry crowd. Although this miracle is mentioned in all four gospels, John is the only one who indicates where the five loaves of bread and two fishes used by Jesus come from. The evangelist alludes to a little boy who provides them, thus highlighting a personal sacrifice which leads to a multitude of people being fed in abundance.

Lewis refers to the principle of giving up before receiving in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Edmund, one of the protagonists of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, enters Narnia through a magical wardrobe and meets the White Witch, who has usurped the rule of the land. She knows about an old prophecy predicting that two daughters of Eve and two sons of Adam will rule Narnia and is therefore desperate to learn more about this human child and his three siblings. In order to get information out of him, she feeds Edmund enchanted and addictive Turkish Delight, so that he craves it more and more without realising it will eventually kill him. Moreover, he loses all caution and delivers the information the Witch wants. It makes him a traitor to his brother and sisters, as well as to the Faun who failed to report his sister Lucy's previous visit to Narnia. Edmund also listens to the Witch's promises of making him a king and ruling over his siblings. Thus, he prioritises the satisfaction of his bodily desires, his "pride" and his "rebellious instinct" (Downing 93).[1] This leads Edmund to be careless and to endanger the lives of several people, including his own. Much later, once he has undergone a profound change and once he has risked his life to fight on Aslan's side, he indeed reigns over Narnia with his brother and sisters. However, he does so as a legitimate king rather than as the White Witch's adopted son.

Edmund's sister, Lucy, also goes through the temptation of keeping rather than sharing in the same story. She was given a cordial of which just one drop magically heals people. After the battle against the White Witch, she tends to her brother Edmund, who

1 Several critics have suggested that the Turkish Delight represents more than food. Some have seen a veiled reference to sex in it, or more generally to Orientalism with the connotations of unruliness and sensuality it had in Lewis' time (Gordon).

has been mortally wounded. She then wants to stay with him to see if the cordial will work. When Aslan reminds her that there are other people who are wounded, she tells him crossly to wait a minute. However, as soon as Aslan asks her if more people must die because of her brother, she regrets her harsh words and follows the Lion to help others on the battlefield. When she is able to come back to Edmund later, she realises that her brother has been healed, not only physically but also spiritually.[2]

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Lucy undergoes a more personal temptation. While reading a spell book, she comes across an incantation which would make her the most beautiful girl in the world. She has always thought "herself inferior to her sister, especially in physical beauty" (Ford 277), and despite foreseeing how kings would go to war to fight for her favour, she almost utters the words. She only stops because Aslan appears to her on the page of the book and growls at her. When she finally does what she came for, that is, read a spell to make hidden things visible again according to the wish of the islanders who asked her for this favour, she suddenly sees the real Aslan in the room with her. She is so delighted that her face lights up, and "for a moment (but of course she didn't know it), she looked almost as beautiful as that other Lucy in the picture" (*Voyage* 122). In this instant, she gains the beauty she has previously desired and has given up. Yet she does so without the negative consequences the beauty spell would have entailed, like the craving of men, the jealousy of other women, and her own vanity.

Throughout his writings, Lewis claims the need to give up before receiving. He sees it as a way to purify one's motives and to consider one's priorities. He went through this experience in his own life. He wrote in a letter that, when he was young, he "would have given almost *anything* […] to be a successful writer" and even added "I shudder to think what I would have given if I had been allowed" (*Collected Letters 1* 927; original emphasis), maybe hinting at a sort of Faustian pact. After converting to Christianity, he gave up that ambition. Later, he became famous all over the world thanks

2 "He had become his real old self again and could look you in the face" (*Lion* 163).

to *The Chronicles of Narnia*. By then, his motives had completely altered, and he did neither expect nor seek the fame he achieved.

The Notion of *Felix Culpa* Applied to Literature

The seed metaphor inspired Lewis with another idea, which stems from the last part of the verse: "it bears much fruit". In nature, a seed has to die but its very death allows for rebirth into something much better. The seed was just the potential, the fully grown plant is the completion. The mature plant will in turn carry lots of seeds which will allow it to multiply even more.

As far as Christianity is concerned, the idea that what comes next is better than what was before is present in the concept of *felix culpa*, which means "happy fault" in Latin. Liturgies and theologians like Ambrose, Augustine, or Thomas Aquinas have asserted that Jesus Christ came to earth and gave his life because of Adam and Eve's sin, and that the good which resulted from it was greater than the original evil. Without naming it specifically, Lewis refers to the notion of *felix culpa* in *Miracles*:

> The sin, both of men and of angels, was rendered possible by the fact that God gave them free will: thus surrendering a portion of His omnipotence (it is again a deathlike or descending movement) because He saw that from a world of free creatures, even though they fell, He could work out (and this is the re-ascent) a deeper happiness and a fuller splendour than any world of automata would admit. […] Redeemed humanity is to be something more glorious than unfallen humanity would have been […] The greater the sin is, the greater the mercy: the deeper the death the brighter the rebirth. (125–27)

From a narrative point of view, this concept is inherent in every *Bildungsroman*, in every coming-of-age story, in every fairy-tale, and in most adventure stories. According to Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, meeting trials and ordeals is part of the necessary stages of a hero's journey in the archetypal structure of most mythological narratives (81). It is especially present in literature intended for children, since the readers themselves have to

go through a similar process in real life. The protagonists are, in Nathalie Prince's words, "inchoative individuals" (25),[3] and so they have to make mistakes in order to learn, they have to go through difficult times in order to grow, to mature, to gain wisdom, to become adults.[4]

The seven *Narnia* chronicles can be seen as coming-of-age stories. Each of them contains characters who learn from their mistakes or misadventures and some good always comes out of what was at first perceived as being completely negative. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the entire adventure starts because of a rainy day. In *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta is pursued by a lion at night and has to flee for dear life but as a consequence, he meets Aravis, who is also escaping from her situation and travelling to Narnia, and they are able to help each other along the way. In *Inside Prince Caspian*, Devin Brown mentions several examples of an evil turning good in Narnia, but to him, "[p]erhaps the best illustration of this unconventional kind of blessing in disguise will be Eustace's transformation into a dragon in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, a painful ordeal but the only way he will be able to achieve his much-needed character transformation" (83).

As the critic Doris T. Myers has shown in her book *C.S. Lewis in Context*, the seven chronicles as a whole can also be regarded as a life journey, from youth to old age, each book concentrating on a specific aspect of the experience of maturing. She considers them in the order in which they were written rather than in the chronological order of the narratives and she shows that the first three chronicles deal with childhood issues. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the protagonists are treated like infants who have to be fed and directed, whereas in *Prince Caspian*, they are more proactive, as older children would be. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* tackles the beginnings of church life, with a scene of baptism and communion. *The Silver Chair* and *The Horse and His Boy* refer to problems facing young adults – education and marriage. *The Magician's Nephew*

3 "[L]e lecteur de cette littérature se conçoit toujours, de près ou de loin, comme un individu inchoatif, en progression, en apprentissage" (Prince 25).

4 According to Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, "adulthood to grow into" is a necessary ingredient in all "quest fantasies" (123).

deals with middle age and its temptations, and *The Last Battle* with old age, decline, and death (125–81).

So, the initiatory aspect of the tales can be found in the general narrative as well as in each individual story. Beyond these aspects, the dying seed metaphor has a universal dimension for Lewis. He refers to the downward-upward movement as "a thing written all over the world" (*Miracles* 116). To him, this pattern is not only present in nature, in vegetable as well as animal life, but also in mythology, philosophy, and religion.

A U-shaped Pattern

To Lewis, the descent and re-ascent pattern is familiar because it is "the pattern of all vegetable life. It must belittle itself into something hard, small, and death-like, it must fall into the ground: thence the new life re-ascends" (*Miracles* 116). He also claims that the doctrine of Incarnation, that is to say, the fact that God came down from heaven and took on a human body, "puts this principle even more emphatically at the centre. The pattern is there in Nature because it was first there in God" (*Miracles* 116).

Lewis asserts that the concept of necessary death is present in Hinduism, in Greek philosophy, in Romantic poetry, and even in the writings of Aldous Huxley:

> The Indian ascetic, mortifying his body on a bed of spikes, preaches the same lesson; the Greek philosopher tells us that a life of wisdom is "a practice of death". The sensitive and noble heathen of modern times makes his imagined gods "die into life". Mr. Huxley expounds "non-attachment". (*Problem* 91)

Lewis calls the concept of necessary death an "eternal gospel", "revealed to men wherever men have sought" (*Problem* 91).

In an essay entitled "Is Theology Poetry?", Lewis compares this world view with what he calls "universal evolutionism" or "popular scientific cosmology" (16). This belief was prevalent in his time and took an opposite view of the world's story, with an upwards movement followed by a downward one, just like in a tragedy. In this

understanding, humanity started from nothing, progressed through evolution, became stronger and stronger but will one day die when the sun goes cold. The aesthetic quality of this pattern appealed to Lewis, but, as a Christian, he believed in the opposite movement, that of comedy rather than tragedy. He calls it "the very plot of the whole cosmic story – the theme of incarnation, death and rebirth" (16). This idea is also touched upon by his friend Tolkien in his famous essay "On Fairy Stories" in which he exposes the concept of "eucatastrophe": "The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy" (156).

In *The Great Code, the Bible and Literature*, the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye describes the Bible as having an enormous formative influence on the mythological framework of our culture. He writes about the Bible as having a

> narrative structure that is roughly U-shaped, the apostasy being followed by a descent into disaster and bondage, which in turn is followed by repentance, then by a rise through deliverance to a point more or less on the level from which the descent began. […] The entire Bible, viewed as "a divine comedy", is contained within a U-shaped story of this sort, one in which man, as explained, loses the tree and water of life at the beginning of Genesis and gets them back at the end of Revelation. (169)

He likewise mentions that Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection are an echo of the main pattern (174). Frye claims that the Biblical narrative structure has the shape of a comedy. It is also a pattern which is very present in children's literature, in fairy tales, and in fantasy.

The Chronicles of Narnia are intended for children, they belong to the fantasy genre, and they are modelled on the Bible. It is therefore no surprise that the downward and upward movement should appear very clearly in their narrative structure, when one considers the story from beginning to end, that is to say, when one follows the chronological order rather than the order in which the books were published.[5] Indeed, *The Chronicles of Narnia* start with *The Magician's*

5 Several critics, such as Daigle-Williamson, have noted how Dante's *Divine Comedy* is reflected in *Narnia* and in Lewis' novels in general.

Nephew, in which Aslan creates a perfect world, soon spoilt by the arrival of Jadis, who is no other than the creature who will later become the White Witch and who plays the role of the serpent in the garden of Eden. Just like Jesus Christ, Aslan gives up his life voluntarily to save the traitor Edmund and, by submitting to death, triumphs over it and rises again. The seventh volume, *The Last Battle*, ends with an upwards movement, when, after the destruction of Narnia, the protagonists join Aslan's country and travel with him, following his rallying cry "further up and further in" (157).

Apart from the general movement applying to the whole series of chronicles, there are also plenty of micro-versions of the same pattern. Indeed, in each chronicle, at least one of the characters goes through an experience which can be associated with a symbolic death, followed by a rebirth. The most obvious one is the passage through the dark wardrobe which leads the four Pevensie children to the new, unknown world of Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (53).[6] In *Prince Caspian*, it is the eponymous prince who is knocked from his horse by a branch in the forest and who regains consciousness in the cave of a talking badger. Although Caspian has lived in Narnia all his life, he does not know the real Narnia since all the talking animals and other creatures have had to go into hiding. So, waking up to the true Narnia is also a sort of rebirth for Caspian. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the Pevensies' insufferable cousin, Eustace, has to go through the experience of death and rebirth by becoming a dragon and then being transformed into a boy again by Aslan. The same pattern can be found in each of the seven chronicles. It always starts with an experience of darkness, either because it is night-time or because the character is unconscious or prevented by obstacles from seeing. At that moment, he or she is blinded but can often use other senses instead: touch or hearing, for example. Then comes light and vision. Very often, just

6 Some critics have noticed the possibility of interpreting the wardrobe as a womb (Brown, *Inside Narnia* 39), sometimes with negative undertones as for example in David Holbrook's *The Skeleton in the Wardrobe* (quoted in Sayer 1288). For an answer to Holbrook's argument, refer to Christopher (9).

like after a baby is born, the character is then fed or given a drink.[7] All the main characters have to go through this experience of symbolic death followed by new life. It is not seen as an option, but rather as an essential experience.

The death-rebirth pattern not only concerns the inhabitants of Narnia; it is inscribed in the land itself. The world Lewis created is almost entirely technology-free; it is a land of mountains, forests and lakes where nature plays a very important role. During the reign of the White Witch, it was always winter and nature was asleep, but when Aslan comes back, he brings spring with him: the snow melts and gives way to bubbling springs, the birds start to chirp and the flowers grow. Death is defeated and life prevails. The fact that this process is so present in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, both in the land itself and in the experiences of the creatures living in it, indicates how significant it was in the eyes of Lewis.

Conclusion

As well as loving everything to do with nature, Lewis was enthralled by mythologies involving death and rebirth, which he thought "poetic, mysterious and quickening" ("Miracle" 5). When he read the New Testament, John 12:24 is one of two passages which struck him as referring to the "myth of the dying god" ("Miracle" 6). This theme later became one of the main ones in his writings and inspired him in many ways, as this article sought to demonstrate.

The Chronicles of Narnia are intended for children, but they are more than just entertaining reading. As the number of critics who have written and continue to write volumes about them attests,

7 In *The Silver Chair*, Jill encounters Aslan in the woods and at first, she cannot see him very clearly and thinks he is a statue. He becomes real when she hears his voice and he invites her to drink (*Chair* 23). In *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta meets Aslan at night. He feels his breath and hears his voice before seeing him when the day dawns (*Horse* 128–29). As for Bree, the horse, he feels Aslan's whiskers tickling his ear when first meeting him (*Horse* 158). In *The Magician's Nephew*, the whole group go through the experience of discovering a new world after having been plunged into darkness (*Nephew* 94). In *The Last Battle*, the epiphany takes place when they come out of the stable into Aslan's Country (*Battle* 126). Ransom also goes through this birth experience when arriving on Mars (*Planet* 41) and then Venus (*Perelandra* 31). For more details, refer to Mochel-Caballero (159–68).

they are complex and contain all of Lewis's favourite ideas and reflections. This is true of the death-rebirth motif, which is explored through the notion of renouncement, the concept of *felix culpa*, and the symbolism of the downward-upward movement. Indeed, it could be argued that these leitmotifs are more visible in *The Chronicles of Narnia* than in many of Lewis's other books. This may have to do with the literary genre of mythopoeia, in which Lewis classifies *The Chronicles of Narnia* as well as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and which he perceives as a genre that is able to disclose concealed realities. Commenting on his friend's masterpiece in an article, Lewis actually argues that the myth in it allows readers to "restore to [all the things they know] the rich significance which has been hidden by 'the veil of familiarity'" ("Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings'" 116). His advice is: "If you are tired of the real landscape, look at it in a mirror. […] By dipping [things] in myth, we see them more clearly" (116).

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"Till Death Do Us Part" – or Not? Death as a Unifier in *The Last Battle* by C.S. Lewis

Iulia-Teodora Driscu

Although death is usually viewed as a great divider in secular culture, C.S. Lewis challenges this perspective by offering a reverse one. He portrays death as a unifier with one's contemporaries, ancestors and finally with God. This paper analyses Lewis's treatment of death in the last book of The Chronicles of Narnia, The Last Battle *(1956), by drawing parallels between his main ideas about the subject and their corresponding scriptural sources of inspiration. The aim of my research is to highlight Lewis's fascinating outlook on death as being only a door to a better life.*

Obwohl der Tod in der säkularen Kultur gewöhnlich als ‚großer Trenner' betrachtet wird, stellt C.S. Lewis diese Sichtweise in Frage, indem er eine umgekehrte Perspektive anbietet. Er zeichnet den Tod als ein verbindendes Element mit den eigenen Zeitgenossen, Vorfahren und schließlich mit Gott. Dieser Artikel analysiert Lewis' Behandlung des Todes im letzten Buch der Chroniken von Narnia, Der letzte Kampf *(1956), indem Parallelen zwischen seinen wichtigsten Ideen zu diesem Thema und ihren entsprechenden biblischen Inspirationsquellen gezogen werden. Das Ziel der Untersuchung ist es, Lewis' faszinierende Sichtweise des Todes als nur einer Tür zu einem besseren Leben herauszustellen.*

Introduction

"Till death do us part" must certainly ring a bell for everyone. The popular phrase originated from *The Book of Common Prayer* issued by the Church of England in its days of infancy, being mostly used in Christian weddings in the form of "till death us do part" (310). The meaning behind it is quite straightforward: it was used as a type of contract, stating that spouses cannot be separated unless one of them dies. However, if we were to use this phrase in a wider context, we might be tempted to think that we should enjoy the

company of our loved ones on earth as much as we can because we will not see them again afterwards insofar as death will indeed 'do us part'. We can hug our family, spend quality time together, learn from each other only 'till death do us part', for afterwards a huge chasm of mystery stretches in front of us. Although nobody could say what happens after death with certainty, this topic is certainly a fertile field for literary speculation. This paper challenges the idea of death as a divider in the fascinating realm of literature, adducing C.S. Lewis's famous novel *The Last Battle* (1956), the last book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. As Lewis was a Christian writer *par excellence*, I will trace the origin of his eschatological ideas down to the very source, the Bible.

Although death is sometimes perceived in secular society as the grim reaper with a scythe and a black hooded robe that comes unexpectedly and unwelcomed to collect human souls,[1] the imagery in Christianity is totally different. Since Christ defeated death by His Resurrection, He is, for instance, represented in Byzantine icons dressed in a white robe with His hands stretched out towards a depiction of the first biblical couple, Adam and Eve.[2] The difference between mythological or folkloric representations and Christian ones is quite substantial. The aspect that I will focus on is the affective reaction that each of them evokes: the grim reaper is a reason for dread and despair, while the Christian icon is a source of transcendent hope in the afterlife. If we were to represent Lewis's view on death, we would certainly choose the second option, for the British author uses deeply Christian ideas in his writings, as I will prove below. Instead of dividing people, death in his works unites them in a series of supernatural meetings: with contemporaries whom they have loved, their forefathers and ultimately with God Himself. Along with these meetings, I will also refer to some general attributes of death that emerge from the chosen examples.

1 Some examples of this perspective could be found in the books *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* by J.K. Rowling, *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman or the films *Scream*, *Death Takes a Holiday*, *Reaper*.

2 Since Lewis was a Christian, I kept the traditional way of writing all references to God and the Bible with capital letters.

The book under scrutiny, *The Last Battle*, describes the apocalypse of the imperfect land of Narnia and the beginning of a paradisiacal world to which only the good characters have access. This is indeed quite an unusual ending, especially for a book written for children, as Michael Ward remarks in his work *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis*: "He dares to do something hardly associated with so-called 'children's literature': he kills off every single character with whom the story opens" (198). In Lewis's own words in one of his letters to children, the aim of the book is described as representing "the coming of Antichrist (the Ape). The end of the world, and the Last Judgement" in the world of the talking beasts of Narnia (Lewis, *Collected Letters* 1245). This is why he contends that the book is governed by Saturn, the planet of death. My article supports this idea but highlights Lewis's real intention in talking about death: that of showing the beauty of paradise. Further, through all that which will be discussed below, I will show how Lewis portrayed the defeat of death in his last book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Reunion with Contemporaries

After the Ape has turned the enchanted realm of Narnia into a terror-driven territory, the hoax of the false Aslan comes to an end. We meet the heroes of the second book – Peter, Edmund and Lucy, without Susan this time – who describe their odd entry into the magical realm as the New Narnia is gradually revealed to them as a sublime land. When Aslan enters the story, the reader finds out what really happened with the siblings who have entered the lion's country (the equivalent of paradise) together: they have all died in a railway accident.

Aslan gives the children the news of their death using surprising language: "There *was* a real railway accident [...] all of you are – as you used to call it in the Shadow-lands – dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning" (Lewis, *Battle* 183; original emphasis). The lion talks about death as people normally do about life, as the morning of their existence.

Death is associated with holidays instead of school, which shows a release from responsibility and a period of great leisure. If this life constrains people in different ways, the end of it is seen as the escape from all the oppressive bonds and an entrance into peace.

As contemporaries, the heroes have been in Narnia through many marvellous adventures together, forming a fantastic unity. The underlying meaning here seems to be that one can enter Aslan's country hand in hand with siblings or best friends. They have not suffered loss as they would have if just one of them had died, but in this situation they eternalised their relationship by stepping into the afterlife together. Lewis took one of the greatest fears of humanity, that of losing a loved one, of being separated by the insurmountable chasm of death, and smashed it to pieces by making the three heroes die together. By synchronising the events in such a manner, the main characters continue their close relationship after death as though nothing had happened (actually, they had not even realised that they were dead until Aslan told them). This is, of course, an indication that love conquers death by going on beyond this life.

Considering the fact that Lewis was a devout Christian, very keen on defending the faith in apologetic works such as *Mere Christianity*, *The Problem of Pain*, or *Miracles*, it is only natural to draw some parallels between the last book and the New Testament. The idea that death keeps the feeling of love intact has a biblical equivalent in the words of Christ at the Last Supper, the last dinner He had with His apostles before His Crucifixion: "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). The phrase "with you" implies the promise that Christ will see them again (and therefore they will see each other) in the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, their relationship of trust, love and friendship will not end after death, it will last beyond it. As a result, death here is certainly a unifier, the means by which the apostles and Christ will be together again. It appears as a promise of a much expected event. This is probably why Saint Paul the Apostle claimed that: "For to me […] to die *is* gain" (Phil. 1:21). Death as gain is likewise the central idea of *The Last Battle*, not only due to the unity in the afterlife it emphasises, but also with regard to the general atmosphere of something

better, greater and purer that people can have access to at the end of their life.

Union with Ancestors

The second great encounter that Lewis portrays in this work of fiction is that with one's ancestors. After the three children have died in the train crash, they enter Aslan's country, where they meet all their friends from the previous books. What is most astonishing is that even the characters who appear later in *The Chronicles*, such as King Tirian, have the chance to meet their Narnian ancestors, who had died long before they were born and of whom they have only heard in historical tales about ancient Narnia:

> Everyone you had ever heard of (if you knew the history of these countries) seemed to be there. There was Glimfeather the Owl and Puddleglum the Marsh-wiggle, and King Rilian the Disenchanted, and his mother the Star's daughter and his great father Caspian himself. And close beside him were the Lord Drinian and the Lord Berne and Trumpkin the Dwarf and Truffle-hunter the good Badger with Glenstorm the Centaur and a hundred other heroes of the great War of Deliverance. (And then from another side came Cor the King of Archenland with King Lune his father and his wife Queen Aravis and the brave Prince Corin Thunder-Fist, his brother, and Bree the Horse and Hwin the Mare. And then – which was a wonder beyond all wonders to Tirian – there came from further away in the past, the two good Beavers and Tumnus the Faun.) And there was greeting and kissing and hand-shaking and old jokes revived. (Lewis, *Battle* 178–79)

This fantastic reunion in the land of the New Narnia (a possible allegory of the New Jerusalem) is instructive for my discussion. Lewis reunites heroes from all seven books of *The Chronicles* in a powerful scene of universal brotherhood and friendship. In Narnian time, thousands of years have passed between the events narrated in the first book, *The Magician's Nephew*, and those that are depicted in the last one, and there were also many years in between the events pre-

sented in the other novels.[3] For instance, Tumnus the Faun is a hero in the second book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, while King Rilian is one of the main characters of the sixth book, *The Silver Chair*. They could not have met in their Narnian life, but they do so in the hereafter. King Tirian, Narnia's last king, is flabbergasted when he meets the two Beavers, heroes of the second book of the series, because to him they were almost mythological figures.

Furthermore, it seems that after death, all the unfortunate circumstances of their lives have been mended and compensated, as in the case of King Caspian and his son, Rilian. The latter was abducted and spent many years enchanted in a type of exile, without being able to see his father. When he was finally released, his father died soon after, so they did not have the chance to actually spend much time together. However, after their deaths, they are finally reunited and have infinite time in each other's company.

The powerful idea Lewis expresses here is that time is abolished by death, that this limit of human existence is no longer valid, and that characters of different generations, separated in life sometimes by hundreds of years, can thus stand together and talk. The foregrounded vision is that of humanity as a whole gathered in an otherworldly place. Death is therefore presented as an entrance to a new type of world, with different coordinates: time itself is no longer valid; instead of *fugit irreparabile tempus*, the characters enter a static eternity, a day with no sunset, in which they would never be rushed or worried by the approaching night. Death is the gate through which they all entered eternity, as Lewis wrote in one of his letters: "The only way for us to Aslan's country is through death" (*Letters to Children* 45). By saying this, the British author belittles death, makes it far less menacing than it is generally regarded in secular culture, and even adds a positive and exciting facet to it. It also fulfils what is perhaps one of people's deepest desires: meeting their ancestors, the heroes of their country, the ones they cherished and admired in history. By abolishing time, Lewis brings together the heroes of all of his books in the series in a symphony

3 In this article I use the internal chronology of *The Chronicles* (which starts with *The Magician's Nephew* and ends with *The Last Battle*), not the chronological order of publication.

of joy that works as a strategy of providing a sense of closure for the readers and "a picture of the entire history of Narnia from its creation to its unmaking" (Duriez 141).

The image of death as defying time mirrors some verses from the New Testament, as I have already shown above and will further explain below. The reunion with one's ancestors is an idea enunciated by Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Matthew on the occasion of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor: "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). Here, Christ refers to the fathers of the Old Testament, people who lived thousands of years ago. According to the passage quoted above, their death did not mean their total disappearance, their complete annihilation, but just a relocation to another world. Through death (as a passage), contemporary and ancient people have the chance to come together to share their experiences beyond time. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that only the morally good characters are gathered in this enchanting reunion; only "those who loved the true Aslan inherit the new, resurrected Narnian kingdom for ever" (Jacobs 275). We do not hear of Jadis, the White Witch, who killed Aslan in the second book, or of Shift, the talking Ape in the last book, or of any other antagonists in the series; we know nothing of their eternal whereabouts.

Union with God

The third and most important encounter described in *The Last Battle* is that with God, represented here again by Aslan, the great lion. He is the one who created the enchanted world of Narnia, whose cosmogony is described in the first book of the series, *The Magician's Nephew*. The paramount scene in *The Last Battle* could be Lucy's encounter with Aslan in the New Narnia: "And then she forgot everything else, because Aslan himself was coming, leaping down from cliff to cliff like a living cataract of power and beauty" (Lewis 182–83). The meeting with the God of Narnia has a powerful effect on the little girl, which resembles what Rudolph Otto called the

"*fascinans*", for example "the attracting and alluring moment of the numinous" (145; original emphasis). Aslan is fascinating for her, he has the power of captivating her attention and directing her wishes towards him.

It is worth noting that Lucy is the one who actually discovers the fantastic realm of Narnia and the one who has the most encounters with Aslan, as she is "the most pure-hearted character in the chronicles" (Downing 143). Lewis probably intended to incarnate in her one of the Beatitudes: "Blessed *are* the pure in heart,/ For they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8; original emphasis). The only fundamental difference between Lucy's previous meetings with the lion and the one in *The Last Battle* is that Aslan does not leave this time. In the past, he only appeared for a while to help the children in their marvellous adventures and then disappeared again. This time, after Lucy's reply that they are afraid of being sent back again to their world, he explains to them that they cannot return because they died.

Similarly, the encounter with God after death is alluded to in the Gospel of Luke where he reports on the last moments of Jesus's existence on earth, when He is crucified between two criminals. One of the criminals repents of his sins and asks God to be remembered in His Kingdom. Christ responds in the following way: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). These words suggest that the reunion will take place in heaven, which is exactly what Lewis depicts in the last book of the series. The event in *The Last Battle* mirrors in some ways the one quoted above. Lucy met Aslan in person before and after her death, as did the criminal while being on the cross next to Christ, and then, not long afterwards, we assume, he found Him in Paradise. The human heroes of the *Narnia* series were always afraid that Aslan would send them back to their world, which is what they expect to happen again when they see him in the scene described above. However, Aslan explains to them that they do not need to fear being forced to leave anymore as they are dead, which means that he can finally stay with them forever. The perspective that unfolds is a sublime one indeed: a reunion of the created with the Creator, without boundaries of time or space. The ending also symbolises a

return to the essential, to the root of everything, as Aslan is the one who begins *The Chronicles* with his creation of Narnia and who ends his own world with the apocalypse described in *The Last Battle*, thus bringing his beloved friends to a flawless new world.

The name attributed to the world from which the heroes came is suggestive, as Aslan calls it "the Shadow-lands" (Lewis, *Battle* 183; also the last chapter of the book is entitled "Farewell to Shadow-lands"). If this life is only a shadow, this means that the next one is the real thing. This image evoked by Lewis is associated with a very popular motif in literature, that of life as a dream, while it is also referred to repeatedly in philosophy. For instance, one can clearly see that Lewis's metaphor is borrowed from Plato's myth of the cave, as found in *The Republic*. In Book VII, Socrates tells the story of a young man who has lived all his life in an underground den, forced to look at some shadows projected on a wall. When he finally steps out of his prison, he sees the sun, the true light, and the real objects. Through this retrospective vision, he can comprehend that he lived in a world of shadows before discovering reality itself (Plato 253–57). The same type of realisation is used by Lewis when he talks of "the Shadow-lands" (*The Last Battle* 183): just like the young man in Plato's myth, the heroes understand in hindsight that their previous life was only a shadow of life; after they die, they realise that there is another life in true light. Besides, associating the actual real life with shadows produces a feeling of defamiliarisation in the readers, because it is commonly used in the reverse way (for example death as a shadow). The effect is that it does not meet the readers' expectations and it makes them perceive these notions from a fresh perspective. While the motif of death is generally used in a negative way, Lewis explores its positive aspect by suggesting that death is actually an awakening from the dream of life. In this light, the death of the children seems to be "a beginning rather than an end, as the new Narnia is revealed" (Duriez 142).

Conclusion

To put it in a nutshell, in the last book of his *Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis describes the idea of death as a unifier, attempting a major defiance of an event especially dreaded in the secular world. The encounters he portrays, with the heroes' contemporaries, their ancestors and finally with the Narnian God, Aslan, are of an exquisite and marvellous nature. I have drawn some parallels between Lewis's images and the corresponding verses from the New Testament in order to show the many ways in which C.S. Lewis incorporated his religious ideas on death in *The Last Battle*. The aspect that the three types of (re)unions have in common is the incredible intensity of emotion they evoke: the children are glad that they are together even after death, everyone is overjoyed and amazed when they meet their ancestors and old friends, and the heroes delight in the thought that they will never be separated from Aslan again, for he will not send them back to their world this time. It is certainly a different kind of 'happily ever after', not often found in children's literature, as all the characters are dead in the end. Yet, this unusual ending develops a Christian eschatological view which may arouse the curiosity of the readers and give them some powerful ideas to ponder.

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Divine Immortality as a Curse in Madeline Miller's *Circe*

Raphaela Behounek

Madeline Miller's novel Circe *(2018) raises the question of whether the witch of Aiaia is simply the Homeric version of a cunning and tempting sorceress, or rather a well-rounded female figure with a rich backstory and doubts about her own immortality. Published at the height of the #MeToo movement, Miller's novel engages with two issues that the following paper will discuss. Firstly, it contributes to the rich and commonly negatively connotated mythology around the witch Circe by offering an engaging background narrative in which Circe's actions and reactions become traceable and understandable for the readers. Secondly, Miller lets her protagonist defy various conceptions about the gods. By portraying Circe's immortality as a curse rather than a blessing, Miller challenges the media-driven narrative that women have to remain young and age, if at all, gracefully.*

Madeline Millers Roman Circe *(2018) wirft die Frage auf, ob die Hexe von Aiaia lediglich die homerische Version einer listigen und verführerischen Zauberin oder eher eine vielseitige Frauenfigur mit einer ergiebigen Hintergrundgeschichte ist. Millers Roman, der auf dem Höhepunkt der #MeToo-Bewegung veröffentlicht wurde, beschäftigt sich mit zwei Themen, die im folgenden Artikel erörtert werden. Erstens trägt sie zur reichhaltigen und häufig negativ konnotierten Mythologie rund um die Hexe Circe bei, indem sie eine spannende Hintergrunderzählung bietet, in der Circes Handlungen und Reaktionen für die Leser nachvollziehbar und verständlich werden. Zweitens lässt Miller ihre Protagonistin verschiedene Vorstellungen über die Götter in Frage stellen. Indem Miller die Unsterblichkeit von Circe als Fluch und nicht als Segen auslegt, stellt sie das mediale Narrativ in Frage, dass Frauen jung bleiben und, wenn überhaupt, in Würde altern müssen.*

Introduction

Homer's *Odyssey* is one of the best-known texts from antiquity: The titular wandering hero, fallen out of the gods' graces, is unable to return to Ithaca at the end of the war on Troy. It is a story that has been handed down through generations and cultures. Long and arduous journeys are still referred to as odysseys; the intelligence of Odysseus and the beauty and wisdom of his wife Penelope are known far and wide. Another character that is ever-present is the witch Circe. Daughter of the sun-God Helios and the nymph Perse, the goddess is a mistress of witchcraft, especially transformation and herbology. Even in Homer's patriarchal society and epic poem, Circe is a strong woman who transforms her visitors into tame animals and protects her island from all dangers. She is a beautiful temptress, whose charm the soldiers cannot resist - or at least that is the description we usually get.

Since Circe has a widely accessible background and is a thoroughly established character, the question arises whether a feminist retelling of her story is really necessary. After all, Circe is already a strong and brave woman who leads a self-determined life in Homer's version of the myth. However, Madeline Miller's novel shows that Homer's narrative is only one side of the coin and that a sorceress on a remote island must certainly have a backstory that is worth telling. In her 2018 novel *Circe*, Miller offers a rich re-interpretation of the myth that not only gives Circe more agency than she has in Homer's version, but that also discusses contemporary questions: Is immortality really a desirable state or should a graceful life and death be more preferable? And what is the inherent worth of divine immortality? To answer these questions, the following paper offers a brief close reading of the mythological source material before mapping out the character development of Miller's Circe. Furthermore, it presents a short analysis of the symbolism of water in similes and metaphors concerning immortality. Lastly, this paper discusses the idea of divine immortality as experienced by Circe and the other divinities, demonstrating why immortality is seen as a curse in Madeline Miller's novel.

Homer's Circe

Before outlining Circe's character development in the novel, one should examine Homer's Circe. Readers first encounter her in Book X of *The Odyssey*, when the grief-stricken crew lands on the island Aiaia, "the home of the beautiful Circe, a formidable goddess, with a mortal woman's voice" (X.136–37). Odysseus divides his crew and sends about half to the house in the woods. There they encounter tame mountain wolves and lions that "rose on their hind legs to fawn on them, with much wagging of their long tails" (X.212–13) and hear the beautiful voice of a woman, singing at her loom. They call to the woman, who then prepares a feast for them, but mixes one of her draughts into the wine. The men are turned into pigs and driven into sties with blows of a stick. Book X portrays a rather aggressive Circe, who uses not only magic to subjugate the men, but also physical violence. Whether one considers these actions to be justified or not, they are certainly the actions of a self-sufficient woman who knows how to defend herself against surprise visitors. However, this image of a strong sorceress does not last, for when Odysseus confronts her and presents his sword, Circe "with a shriek […] slipped below [his] blade, clasped [his] knees and burst into tears" (X.323). Only after restoring Odysseus's position of power is Homer's Circe allowed to seduce the hero, and from that point onwards, Circe's "black magic" is only used to benefit the heroes. About a year later, when Odysseus and his men long to leave Aiaia, Odysseus himself "clasped the goddess's knees in supplication" (X.479–80). As Judith Yarnall argues, "[t]he gesture of surrender thus becomes balanced, mutual" (15).

As a consequence of both the position of Circe's narrative as having a book of her own in the poem and the textual evidence offered, it can be said that Homer's depiction of Circe is a rather balanced one. Circe appears to fulfil many stereotypical ideals of antique womanhood: she feeds and takes care of the men, is aptly afraid of brave Odysseus, and can be kept under control through Hermes's knowledge of herbology, for example when he offers herbs to Odysseus that severely limit Circe's magical influence on him. One can also refer to Circe's own words on this account: "It is

a common saying that women are delicate creatures, flowers, eggs, anything that may be crushed in a moment's carelessness" (Miller 330). She is also a powerful sorceress who lives on her island without any male relatives or watchdogs and is more than able to defend herself. One question that Homer neither asks nor implicitly answers is why Circe's powers and position in the realm of divinities is such an impactful one "[w]ith unbound power. Who need not answer to none but herself" (179). Madeline Miller states that

> [t]he assumption has often been that it's because she's just naturally cruel and capricious. But that's not the character Homer gives us. After she and Odysseus become lovers she's incredibly helpful to him, offering him vital advice about navigating the monsters and obstacles on the path ahead. She clearly cares for him, but she never tries to keep him against his will. I wanted to dig into that complexity, her menace and her benevolence both. (Women's Prize for Fiction n.p.)

So while the cultural perception of Circe through Homer's poetry seems to paint the image of a self-centred, ferocious island-witch, Miller's novel attempts to focus on the multi-faceted nature of this almost marginal character. However, "[t]o interpret Homer is to embark upon an enterprise fraught with risks, chief among them the possibility of distorting with one's own cultural and personal biases a myth that is complete and compelling as presented" (Yarnall 17). As a female reader in the twenty-first century, I am no exception to what Yarnall calls risky enterprises and carry my own bias, namely the wish for an independent female character from a literary and social period when women did not have powerful positions within society. This bias seems to be carried into Madeline Miller's adaptation of the mythological narrative of Circe.

Miller's Circe

Having studied Latin and Ancient Greece, Miller is a trained classicist. In her dramaturgical work, she focuses on adapting classical tales for contemporary audiences. As a teacher and a reader, both *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* are among the most influential works she

cites throughout interviews, for example in *The Guardian*'s Saturday interview (Cochrane). Her first novel, *The Song of Achilles*, which was published in 2011, tells the story of the close bond between Patroclus and Achilles. This retelling of the *Iliad* from Patroclus's perspective focuses on the intimate relationship between the two heroes, which is not an entirely new idea as both antique and more contemporary scholarship debates: "From the fifth century B.C., the nature of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus as presented by Homer was a matter for discussion among writers and scholars in antiquity[.] […] [B]ut the view that they were lovers prevailed" (Morales and Mariscal 292). Nevertheless, this queer perspective still appears to be quite uncommon in mainstream popular culture, which is often coloured by director Wolfgang Petersen's (2004) or even archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann's ideas of Troy. In her first novel we can thus already see a drive to adapt mythological narratives to fit contemporary concerns around questions of gender and sexuality.

In April 2018, Miller's second novel *Circe* was published to much popular and critical acclaim. Ron Charles at *The Washington Post* firmly roots Miller's second novel within the #MeToo movement: "The archaeological evidence is sketchy, but the first pussy hat was probably knitted by Circe. Among nasty women, the witch of Aeaea has held a place of prominence since Homer first sang of her wiles" (n.p.). In *The Guardian*, Aida Edemariam summarises *Circe* as such:

> And that is where Miller anchors her story – in the emotional life of a woman. She is not the first to see the potential in Circe, who over the centuries has been interpreted as everything from a parable against drunkenness to an embodiment of emasculation. [...] Miller's is a feminist version in which everything is at stake. (n.p.)

In both novels, the plot is hardly a mystery meant to be solved. Most readers will have an idea of Circe's encounters with the Minotaur, her niece Ariadne, and above all Odysseus. What is noteworthy, however, is the language with which Miller accentuates characters and themes, allowing her readers to retrace what she perceives to be at the heart of Homer's epic poems.

One of the central concerns in *Circe* is the protagonist's backstory. Homer does not give much information about how Circe came to be on her island in solitude and what kind of character she is, apart from one begging at Odysseus' knees. The way Miller phrases Circe's judgement of Homer's epic poem can be read as a hint to how Miller herself perceives the representation in the poem, which is rather unkind:

> Later, years later, I would hear a song made of our meeting. The boy who sang it was unskilled, missing notes more often than he hit[.] […] I was not surprised by the portrait of myself: the proud witch undone before the hero's sword, kneeling and begging for mercy. Humbling women seems to me a chief pastime of poets. As if there can be no story unless we crawl and weep. (Miller 213)

But who is Miller's Circe, other than a woman refusing to humble herself? Miller's genealogy is the same as Homer's: Her father is the sun god Helios, a powerful deity who "was bound to no will but his own" (12). Her mother Perse cast her aside immediately after birth to "make a better one" (6) and her siblings spend most of their days teasing her. For a majority of her early life, it even remains unclear what exactly she is – nymph or lesser water-goddess are the terms usually given to her, but neither appear to be fitting. There is no love between her close family, even her beloved brother Aeëtes eventually leaves her, as he prefers to rule his own kingdom, rather than remain with his doting sister. So Circe is left alone by everyone in her father's vast halls: "Such were my years then. I would like to say that all the while I waited to break out, but the truth is, I'm afraid I might have floated on, believing those dull miseries were all there was, until the end of days" (13). This idea of eternity floating and swimming by is vividly expressed through Miller's figurative use of language. Seeing that Circe's familial origins are those of a lesser water-goddess, the idea of time stretching on like a slow and unending river is neither a new connotation, nor a surprising metaphor. Circe as narrator is prone to use similes connected to water and this clear lexical alignment with water is dominant in the first part of the novel, before Circe fully realises her abilities of controlling flora and fauna as well as using them for her magic. The

house she grew up in was "always faintly damp from the presence of so many water-gods" (74). Expressions "darted like schools of fish in the water" (70) across her brother's face and "all those years [she] had spent with them were like a stone tossed in a pool. Already, the ripples were gone" (80). The reason for Circe's exile on Aiaia and her full transformation from nymph-like goddess to powerful witch is her usage of witchcraft against her own god-like family by turning the nymph Scylla into a sea monster. Furthermore, Circe is used by her father as a bargaining chip against Zeus in the endless struggle between the titan divinities and the Olympian gods. Once Circe is left alone on the island and can discover herself, the similes switch to more mortal, heaven- and earth-bound ones: "I will not be like a bird bred in a cage, I thought, too dull to fly even when the door stands open. I stepped into those woods and my life began" (84). Pamela Mittlefehldt argues that especially for women writers, water can be read as a metaphor for creativity as well as for time:

> Water is illusion: steam, fog, mist. Water is force: storm, torrent, tsunami. Water is light: refractions of a million suns, glittering sparks of distant fire. Water is depth beyond comprehension, cold beyond flame. […] We ourselves are contradictory, elusive, mutable beings. (139)

So, water in Miller's metaphorical usage serves two concrete narrative purposes. It expresses Circe's centuries of subdued existence among the immortals, where time was flowing ceaselessly, and whether Circe existed outside or inside of her family's halls did not make a difference. But it also serves as a reminder of the force behind the witch once she realises her potential. Like water, Circe's sorcery is a powerful tool that one needs to explore and learn to harness: "Then I learned that I could bend the world to my will, as a bow is bent for an arrow. I would have done that toil a thousand times to keep such power in my hands" (86). Circe already used her powers when she was living as a nymph, when they came naturally to her and involved no conscious effort. However, once she accepts and harnesses the power that the world of the mortals – away from naiads, nymphs, and water gods and goddesses – can offer,

she grows more powerful, and her abilities grow with both her efforts and her distance to the water-based power.

Against Divine Immortality

Circe's struggle into a fully formed, rounded character as well as her witchcraft both set her apart from the rest of her divine family. While divine graces and enjoyment of immortality come easy to her siblings, Circe grapples with this aspect of her life the most. When Circe was born, "the name for what [she] was did not exist. They called [her] nymph, assuming [she] would be like [her] mother and aunts and thousand cousins" (3). She accepted her role as the "[l]east of the lesser goddesses, [their] powers were so modest they could scarcely ensure [their] eternities" (3). Immortality and the worship by mortals is reserved for the great divinities, not nymph-like beings as Circe; especially not when these nymphs are "named *Hawk,* Circe, for [their] yellow eyes, and the strange, thin sound of [their] crying" (6, my emphasis). Having never felt at home among the immortal gods and goddesses, it is easy for Circe to decry her own "relentless divinity" (66). Considering further that her only relationships based on kindness and true connection were with mortals such as Daedalus, Odysseus, and Glaucos (before he was turned into a god), Circe's loyalty is clearly aligned with the mortals: "there are rare moments when another soul dips near yours, as stars once a year brush the earth. Such a constellation was [Daedalus] to me" (157). In a podcast about *Circe*, Miller stressed this longing for *nostos*, the ancient Greek word for homecoming:

> I wanted her to be looking for her family, her real family, her found family and the sort of home but she doesn't know where it is. It isn't like Ithaca, it doesn't exist geographically it's something she has to decide and create. And so in that sense I think she has all these qualities but she doesn't have a community. In order to have those qualities she has to live entirely alone. And so the one thing she still lacks is connection. (Recall this Book)

This lack of connection is obvious when Circe lives in her father's halls, but it becomes even more striking when her life with her family is put in contrast with her punishment. When Circe arrives on Aiaia, she is completely alone for the first time in her life. Before feeling the freedom this offers, she reflects on why her father considers the exile a punishment: "To be utterly alone. What worse punishment could there be, my family thought, than to be deprived of their divine presence? […] That was my new home: a monument to my father's pride" (Miller 81–82). The biggest issue Circe takes with her punishment here is neither the exile nor having been used for the trade with Zeus that preceded it, but the complete lack of understanding her divine family shows. As the novel progresses, this indifference is not only shown by her family, but Circe extends this to be a condition of immortality: Mortals "could not imagine the scope of gods, the mercilessness that comes of seeing generations rise and fall around you" (282). "There was no mercy among the gods, I had known it all my life" (293). The older Circe gets, the more disillusioned she becomes:

> The gods and their incomprehensible rules. Always there was a reason you must kneel. […] How many times would I have to learn? Every moment of my peace was a lie, for it came only at the gods' pleasure. No matter what I did, how long I lived, at a whim they would be able to reach down and do with me what they wished. (238)

No divine being has ever treated Circe with understanding, compassion, or kindness. She has been discarded and replaced, traded off for another/one more century of unstable peace between Helios and Zeus. The impression of divinity and immortality that is imprinted on Circe is a question of usefulness and a never-ending quest for power and novelty. Gods such as Helios or Hermes, and even Circe's siblings, only acknowledge her when she becomes useful, for example during the birth of the Minotaur, as only an immortal witch can help birth the monster. As the quote shows, Circe feels that gaining the upper-hand or at least leading a self-sufficient life is impossible as long as she continues to feel as a member of the family and abides by the rules dictated by her father Helios and

her siblings. While Circe herself does not fully realise this in the beginning, her sister Pasiphaë is well aware:

> They take what they want, and in return they give you only your own shackles. […] [E]very time, I thought, that is it, she is done, […] she will leave us and good riddance. Yet always you came back the next day. […] You loathed [our family] as I did. I think it is where our power [as witches] comes from. (151)

The only thing that could make a god afraid is a "power greater than their own" (46). This realisation that there will never be true companionship between immortals, but always a disconnect based on power relations, completely disheartens Circe.

Desirable Mortality

Circe's experiences with and views of mortals, on the contrary, are substantially different. Of course, there are "the practicalities. By the time we learn their names, they are dead. They must be meteors indeed to catch our attention. The merely good: you are dust to us" (Miller 104). Some of Miller's most memorable characters certainly are such meteors for Circe. Her relationships with Daedalus and Odysseus are marked by tenderness, affection, and a focus on the scars that grace mortal skin. In her encounters with Greek heroes throughout the novel, Circe links these scars with learning experiences and honing one's skills: Daedalus's hands are "deft-looking and thickened with muscle" (105) because he had become a master of his craft; Odysseus' chest was "hatched with scars" (220) because he is a heroic warrior who had his fair share of misery. The smooth and rapidly healing skin of immortals, however, has never felt true failure and, as a consequence, they have no need for growth or development. Mortals, with their limited lifetime, have to make use of their skills and abilities, they feel compassion for other's failures and in the end, this "fragility of mortals bred kindness and good grace" (191).

As empathetic as Circe is towards mortals, the continuous passing of time takes a toll on her understanding of mortal problems. When her niece Medea comes to the island to be cleansed from her fratricide, the encounter with this demigoddess and her mortal husband Jason is an opportunity for reflection: "But she had stripped me to my skin, and now I saw myself in her eyes: a bitter, abandoned crone, a spider, scheming to suck out her life" (Miller 179). It can be argued that Circe's impression of the emotional coldness of divinities is at least partially based on her own experiences. Certainly, her treatment by her family does not foster positive connotations with immortals. But the fact that Miller so openly depicts Circe's own fall into bitterness and indifference shows that the lack of empathy is not a family trait, but a trait shared, if not created, by immortality: "This is the grief that makes our kind choose to be stones and trees rather than flesh" (56). This can also be seen in the countless stories of scheming and mingling by Athena and Zeus, for example the planned attack on and murder of Telegonus by Athena.

Circe actively tries to position herself against this indifference bred by immortality, partially to avoid becoming too similar to the family she hates, but she too is bound by the circumstances of her own unending life. During her son's childhood, she is happy to protect him with her divinity, but when she again falls in love with a mortal, Odysseus' son Telemachus, Circe has to decide: Will she succumb to indifference and see another one of her lovers die or will she take her fate into her own hands by trying to become mortal herself? Considering that Odysseus once said about her "[t]hat he had never met a god who enjoyed their divinity less" (Miller 399), it is a rather easy decision for Circe to let go of her immortality. Using her witchcraft, she takes her own divinity and immortality away to grow old with Telemachus. This active decision marks the final step in Circe's character development:

> I thought once that gods are the opposite of death, but I see now they are more dead than anything, for they are unchanging, and can hold nothing in their hands. All my life I have been moving forward, and now I am here. I have a mortal's voice, let me have the rest. (405)

While most mortals depicted in the novel strive for immortality, either for glory, being close to the gods, or because they want to leave a lasting impression, Circe's dream is to grow old in a quiet and peaceful way. Glaucos summarises his new-found position as such: "I will not think on those days [of mortality]. Every hour some new bruise upon me, some new ache, always weary, always burdened and weak. I sit at councils with your father [Helios] now." (56) The precariousness of family relations and romantic relationships is something that Circe, unlike her divine family, has experienced for half an eternity. Her relationships with divine beings, either with her family or Olympian gods such as Hermes, have been dismissive at best and painful or treacherous at worst. In Circe's eyes, immortality lends former mortals and gods the time to breed their worst qualities: Even humble mortal Glaucos turns against her once he finds himself immortal, though unknowingly through Circe's sorcery (50). While the relationships with mortals such as Odysseus or Daedalus are inherently painful as well, as they ultimately have to leave her, the experiences during their time together are full of contentment in the worst case and love in the best. Even if a mortal life must end eventually, she feels "stupid with luck, crammed with it, stumbling drunk" (404) when she herself becomes mortal. In the end, life's general precariousness is what Circe longs for – what makes her feel and experience the world vividly instead of suffering through it in eventual boredom – because "[t]his is what it means to swim in the tide, to walk the earth and feel it touch your feet. This is what it means to be alive" (405).

Miller has set out to write a feminist adaptation of an ancient myth, so let us briefly consider more contemporary implications of her text. The *#MeToo* movement has raised important questions about the treatment of women, especially in the media industry, and there are constant discussions about how women age and when they are ageing out of the workforce. While this is not an explicit theme in Miller's novel, we are confronted with the very rare narrative of a woman wanting to age: "But I do not wish myself back. Of course my flesh reaches for the earth. That is where it belongs" (404). Circe has confronted almost all prejudices that are levelled against modern women: She is forced to both find solace in her

solitude and create a family and home for herself; she gets to experience the joys and pains of motherhood, in a world that does not accept her motherhood; she feels rejection and heartache and has to watch her lovers leave her; she ages, not always gracefully, but with loose skin and grey hair. Miller's depiction of a woman happily ageing is rare, not only because pop culture often relies on the male gaze, which strives for eternal beauty and positions it as the main goal to attain. Miller skilfully reverses this journey at the very end of the novel, by showing death not as an unstoppable outcome to be avoided, but as the holy grail of her journey through life: "All my life I have been moving forward, and now I am here. I have a mortal's voice, let me have the rest" (405).

Conclusion

For Circe, it is mortality that makes life worth living. Immortality might appear to be a desirable state for many mortals within and outside of the novel; nevertheless Miller's novel suggests that with countless chances to restart or change the narrative, there is hardly any challenge in life. Miller's idea of humanity is thereby completely dependent on the notion that mortals want to strive for meaningful relationships and a world that is both worth living in and worth leaving from. At the core of Circe's beliefs lies the conviction that immortality robs us of empathy, understanding, and the acceptance of imperfections, which are the factors that make life interesting for her in Miller's novel. In societies with a strong set of beliefs in an underworld, such as the Greco-Roman conception of Hades, with its blessed isles, Madeline Miller's novel suggests conclusions that are not limited to the antiquity it is set in, but are impactful for her 21st century readers. Miller's narrative follows a woman who is ultimately neither divine nor mortal enough and constantly strives for something else, without being able to name it for a majority of the novel. Once she discovers that it is mortality she longs for, she can finally find peace and happiness. While the novel, contrary to Miller's intentions, may not fundamentally change popular gender-biases around ageing, or will stop alchemists from looking for the

fountain of youth, it can be argued that Miller wants to support her readers who have enough of not being enough in finding pleasure in a life that can be shaped and created by their own mortal hands.

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Immortality as Body Horror in T. Kingfisher's *What Moves the Dead*

Anna Lüscher

In T. Kingfisher's novel What Moves the Dead*, a retelling of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", the fungus, mentioned briefly in the original, becomes a direct threat to the characters. This fungus embodies eco- and body horror elements, especially due to its characteristics of sentience and absorption. This essay examines how the fungus' influence over minds, bodily autonomy, life, and death turns immortality into a source of body horror. The unknown nature of the fungus and its spread add to the overall horror of the narrative.*

In T. Kingfishers Roman What Moves the Dead*, einer Nacherzählung von Edgar Allan Poes Kurzgeschichte „Der Untergang des Hauses Usher", wird der im Original kurz erwähnte Fungus zu einer direkten Bedrohung für die Figuren. Dieser Fungus verkörpert Elemente des Öko- und des Körperhorrors, insbesondere durch seine Bewusstseins- und Absorptionseigenschaften. Dieses Essay untersucht, wie der Einfluss des Fungus auf Verstand, körperliche Autonomie, Leben und Tod die Unsterblichkeit in eine Quelle von Körperhorror verwandelt. Die unbekannte Natur des Pilzes und seine Ausbreitung verstärken den Gesamtschrecken der Erzählung.*

Introduction

In T. Kingfisher's *What Moves the Dead*, published in 2022, Alex Easton is asked to visit and help his old friend Madeline and her brother Roderick Usher at their remote English home since Madeline has fallen ill and is possibly awaiting death. This setup might already sound familiar to some as it is a retelling of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). Both the original story and Kingfisher's new novel are, firstly, stories centering tightly around the eponymous 'falling' house itself. The house does not just merely denotate the crumbling building but the family, too, as the text outright states: "the 'House of Usher' – an appellation

which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who use it, both the family and the family mansion" (Poe 92). This connection is reiterated and analysed more deeply by Arthur Robinson in his paper concerning "Order and Sentience in 'The Fall of the House of Usher"'. He states that 'house' "applies both to the mansion and to Usher's lineage" (70). The second element that both narratives share is that they are horror stories describing the death of Madeline and her mistaken, premature burial. However, the new novel adds to the psychological horror of the burial an extended element of body horror. In addition to these two shared aspects, the stories also have the presence of fungi in common. The fungi are the focal point of my article since they appear to imply the potential for immortality, while also transforming this potential into a source of body horror. To analyse the connection between the fungi, immortality, and body horror, I will examine these three elements in conjunction before focusing on Madeline and her infected body. This will lead me to the question of Madeline's deaths and her autonomy. I will describe how body horror is a distinct part of the immortality offered by the fungus. Due to the fungus being potentially unstoppable, the horrendous conditions of immortality will have to be borne forever with no way out. In the end, I will broaden my focus to the contamination of nature and the fungus' possible immortality and, therefore, the threat of the fungus, before delving into the aspect of posthumanism. There I will argue that the threat of involuntary posthumanism is embodied by the body horror of the fungus.

In Kingfisher's novel, the Usher house visited by the first-person narrator, the veteran Alex Easton, is situated in the fictional European country of Ruritania. Alex originates from the equally fictitious country of Gallacia, which is described as "near Moldavia and even smaller" (6). He is a woman who uses male pronouns in English. This is a compromise due to English's lack of the specific "ka" and "kan" pronouns that all soldiers, male and female, use in the Gallacian language (23). Besides Alex, the American doctor James Denton and the mushroom expert Eugenia Potter are visiting the Ushers and the area, respectively. Over the course of the story, after Alex arrives at the Ushers' house, it becomes clear that

the house and some of its inhabitants, like Madeline, are infested with a fungus. The source of the fungus is the tarn by the house. James Denton, Eugenia Potter, and Alex Easton work together to help the Ushers but are only able to save Roderick. Madeline supposedly dies, and the house burns down.

Fungus and Immortality as Horror

In the following, two types of horror will be central for discussing Kingfisher's novel, namely ecohorror and body horror. Generally, Carina Stopenski demonstrates in her paper on body horror and the female that, "[a]s a generic entity, horror forces us to evaluate the way terror impacts our bodies" (1), a characteristic that is present independent of the type of horror. She further writes that horror is essentially "the way that emotion is manipulated through the destruction of the body" (1), a sentiment echoed by Susan Yi Sencindiver in her article "'It's Alive!' New Materialism and Literary Horror", in which she describes "visceral body horror" (489) as central to horror in general. Sencindiver then elaborates that, besides the aspects of body horror present in all horror, ecohorror displays two additional key features in this context. She describes these key features to be "two related threats" (489) originating in nature: "the uncanny sentience or animation of nonhuman nature and the absorption of human characters into an unbounded natural world" (489). Stephen Rust and Carter Soles add that ecohorror has also "been narrowly defined in popular discourse as those instances in texts when nature strikes back against humans as punishment for environmental disruption" (509). 'Nature striking back' can be seen here as the fungus reclaiming human bodies by invading them. In *What Moves the Dead*, the general body horror aspect, the two threats of sentience and absorption, and nature reclaiming space are not just present but central to the story.

The horror of the original Poe story is invoked and expanded upon in *What Moves the Dead* by showing the overwhelming power and the accompanying horror of nature when it reclaims spaces and beings for itself in the form of the sentient fungus. The fun-

gus, as a part and a possible representative arm of nature, infects the water and food sources, like hares, cows, and fish, and turns that very nature from something that sustains human life to something life-threatening. The fungus is then not only speculated to be sentient but is so, using the pronoun *va* and the name *tarn* for itself. Thus, in addition to Roderick's possible madness and Madeline's undead state, which is expanded upon, the sentient fungus also becomes a source of horror. In the following, I demonstrate how the fungus is horrifying on three different levels. First, its characteristics of sentience and absorption threaten the characters' bodily and personal autonomy and life, following the conventions of ecohorror. On the second level, the fungus' control over the death and immortality of the infected body is horrifying, as the fungus is what moves the dead. Thirdly, the characters are generally afraid of the unknown nature of the fungus: its spread, characteristics, and how to kill it.[1] This is in response to their fear that the fungus has the potential to completely take them over and control their bodies, minds, and, ultimately, their lives, deaths, and futures.

Therefore, immortality is not a net positive experience but mainly a source of body horror due to the fungus, the source of immortality, being presented as an unknown threat. But how does the source of immortality turn into a source of horror, particularly of body horror? The notion of immortality being horror is especially interesting given that immortality may be viewed as a positive condition, evidenced by the enduring human desire for immortality. This constant aspiration for immortality then finds its expression in various cultural ideas such as the philosopher's stone and mythical food and drink which bestow immortality like the golden apples in Norse ("Idun"; Lindow 198–99) and peaches in Chinese myths (Welch 159; Chwalkowski 177). This longing is also reflected in more contemporary ambitions surrounding technologies like Cryonics. To answer how immortality becomes a source of horror, first, the two terms 'sentience' and 'absorption', mentioned above,

1 This fear of the unknown future is an element which, according to Fred Botting, connects the Gothic and science fiction, because "as long as [the future] is not 'predictable,' 'calculable,' or 'programmable,' 'the future is necessarily monstrous'" (111).

will be utilized to show how body horror is displayed in the story and connected to the fungus.

The Body Horror of the Fungus and Madeline

The aspect of body horror is introduced in the story even before it becomes clear that there is a threat in the form of the sentient fungus. Even more so, the first body horror incident is connected to a different, for now non-sentient fungus, which is introduced as follows:

> The mushroom's gills were the deep-red color of severed muscle, the almost-violet shade that contrasts so dreadfully with the pale pink of viscera. I had seen it any number of times in dead deer and dying soldiers, but it startled me to see it here. Perhaps it would not have been so unsettling if the mushrooms had not looked so much like flesh. The caps were clammy, swollen beige, puffed up against the dark-red gills. They grew out of the gaps in the stones of the tarn like tumors growing from diseased skin. (Kingfisher 1)

These are the story's first sentences, describing mushrooms the narrator finds on his way to his friend Roderick Usher's house. These mushrooms are here explicitly portrayed as looking very similar to flesh, evoking the image of the ground being strewn with body parts – which is particularly significant because the narrator is a veteran, and the mushrooms remind him of dying soldiers. The narrator further identifies the fungus' smell, compounding the connection between death and the mushrooms, to be that of "rotting flesh" (3). The destruction of the human body, implied by the visceral description of the fungus and the smell, creates a connection between the two and introduces a first aspect of body horror early on, even though it is mitigated by the fruiting body of a fungus rather than a human body. The fungi, body horror, and the theme of death are already put into close association here. The horrific impression of these human-body reminiscent mushrooms is underlined by how repelled the narrator is: "I had a strong urge to step back from them [the fungi], and an even stronger urge to poke

them with a stick" (1). The narrator's bodily reaction, which, as mentioned above, fits the horror genre, is crossed with an aspect of fascination when he thinks of poking the fungus. Later, this early introduction of the thematic cluster, containing fungi, body horror, and the theme of death, is repeated and expanded when, for example, Madeline walks around undead with a broken, crooked neck and "her lungs felted with fungus" (141).

The connection of this triad culminates in a scene in which Madeline admits that she died months ago (145), whereby the aforementioned threats of sentience and absorption act as two main representatives of this triad. At this point, Madeline also reveals that she has been teaching the fungus to talk (144), making it once more evident that it is sentient. Further, it becomes clear that, after the fungus became a part of Madeline's body, the two developed a symbiotic relationship in which the fungus keeps Madeline alive, while Madeline teaches it the use of her body. While she says this, the narrator remembers that he met her several nights earlier, apparently sleepwalking and mumbling words. He now realizes that, at times, he had been talking to the fungus inside Madeline's body, which had denied being Madeline by reiterating "No Maddy" (76) when questioned by the narrator. At this point, the difference between Madeline and the fungus remains apparent because the fungus is still learning how to use Madeline's speech organs. Both sentience and absorption are here contained and represented prominently within Madeline's body.

The threat of absorption is then shown, for example, when Madeline's body and the fungus become a single entity so that what the narrator mistakes for white body hair are the fungus' hyphae, growing in "puffs […] like cotton wool […] from under her fingernails, shockingly white against the bruise-black skin" (145). The fungus permeates Madeline's whole body so that she needs to clear out her airways when talking to the narrator because the fungus fills her lungs and thus makes it hard for her to speak: "When I looked back, she had reached up to her mouth and was tugging. Long white strands came out and she wrapped them around her hand, then let them fall carelessly in her lap" (142). Her action's casualness stands in contrast to the body horror of the fungus strands

filling her mouth and the rest of her body, removing her ability to speak. Meanwhile, she also has been teaching the fungus to speak – giving the moment a paradoxical layer, in which the fungus is gaining speech, while she is losing it. This casualness does not serve the function of making the scene less gruesome due to the action's reminiscence of removing a wayward hair in a process of familiarization. Instead, it highlights how detached Madeline already is from 'normal' human behavior and how her alien actions further distance her from the narrator. Thus, a clash of familiarity and alienation arises.

While the movement is casual in the instance above, the fungus' earlier abilities stand in stark contrast as it did not manage to produce smooth, natural movements or speech before. Its attempts to control the body it occupied often failed, and the narrator notes that Madeline's "walk was stiff and strange, starting and stopping the movements at odd places" (74) before he realized that it was the fungus and not Madeline controlling the body. The fungus' failure is further evident when it attempts to smile:

> it was terrible. Madeline's lips pulled up at the corners in a terrible parody of good humor, her mouth stretching painfully wide, her jaw dropped so far that it looked almost like a scream. Above that awful grin, her eyes were as flat and dead as stones. (75)

This smile speaks to the uncanniness of the clash of the familiar and the alien. Ernst Jentsch defines uncanny thus as the "*doubt as to whether an apparently living being is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate*" (11; original emphasis). It is here that horror starts, culminating in the question of how much of Madeline is now fungus.

Immortality versus Autonomy in Death

The fungus attempts to take over the bodies of human characters and, at times, succeeds in making those bodies part of itself – all the while threatening the bodily and personal autonomy of those characters. Similarly, the fungus removes the characters' autonomy

over both death and immortality throughout the story, adding to the horror aspect. Because Madeline is in a symbiotic relationship with the fungus, her four different deaths seem like a lesser example of this removal of autonomy over death and immortality. After all, she chooses to cooperate despite somehow constantly being in the process of dying: (1st) Madeline's first death had presumably nothing to do with the fungus but neither Madeline nor the fungus ever informed anyone of what happened when Madeline fell into the lake. Roderick and Denton seem unsure if she actually died at that time (131), but it is assumed that she did. (2nd) In the lake, she contracts the fungus, which leads to her second death. She died this time, Madeline reports, when questioned later, because the fungus "couldn't help but feed a little", so "[o]f course I died eventually" (145). She connects this death with a personal failure since "if [she] hadn't been so weak, the little bit va has to take to feed wouldn't have mattered" (147). It is not stated how much stronger she would have needed to be to be able to survive the fungus's needs. Her decimation seems to be an accepted cost on the fungus' side, as she admits to the narrator: it "can't keep my body going much longer, I'm afraid. I'm starting to fray at the edges. Some things break down after a while" (145) and yet neither the fungus nor Madeline attempt to change anything to prevent her next potential death. However, when the fungus took too much, and she died this second death, she came back, and the fungus kept taking over and from her. Therefore, the implication is once again that death might not be a permanent condition. Perhaps immortality is still a possibility; even though the question remains whether her body and her mind would both die or if her body would remain alive with just the consciousness of the fungus inside of it. Various possibilities are left open in the end. (3rd) Madeline's third death is then caused by her brother breaking her neck, which she survives again because the fungus takes over the function of her nerves (141). (4th) Madeline's last and, presumably, final death occurs when she is locked in the house by her brother and the narrator before they burn the house down. If Madeline managed to survive, her ability to survive all these deaths implies that if she wanted to die sometime in the future, she would probably need the fungus's consent. However, not

only the fungus makes decisions for her. By concluding that she is beyond their reach, presumably dead, her brother and the narrator justify the use of lethal force against the fungus with her as possible collateral damage. Therefore, they too make a decision concerning her life and death. The fungus, at least, had her consent. Consequently, she does not have autonomy over either her death or, vice versa, her immortality.

Therefore, the paradox of the story is that the fungus kills those it infects but grants them the possibility of immortality. At first, it appears like Madeline is still present as an individual within her resuscitated, infected body and, consequently, the immortality of the body is also one of the mind. However, when they burn the house with Madeline in it, Roderick says: "It sounds like her […] but it's not. It's the other thing" (148). This statement casts doubt on the initial assumption by suggesting that Madeline may have survived physically but not cognitively. A possible interpretation is that while her body is in constant decline since being infected, her mind is too, and while the death of both seems ever present it has just not arrived yet – at least, until she is then trapped in the fire set by her brother and the narrator, Alex.

A second example for the removal of autonomy is introduced through Alice, Madeline's maid, whom Madeline planned to infect to aid her in teaching the fungus speech – "[b]ut then Alice killed herself, that silly creature" (144), she reports callously. To begin with, Alice starts at a different level of autonomy then Madeline. Alice is a maid and as such her class and station in life afford her less autonomy even before the fungus enters the picture. Her station then enables Madeline to use Alice as an available helpmate when teaching the fungus. In contrast to Alice, the narrator, when asked by Madeline to infect himself, is more than happy and able to decline: "*The dead may walk,* [he thinks,] *but I will not walk among them*" (145, original emphasis). Such a refusal is a luxury Alice cannot afford. It is implied in the text that Alice killed herself before being infected because she grasps what being infected by the fungus actually means (141; 144). Alice exerting her agency in this drastic way makes Madeline's continued expectation of the availability of her maid and her body even more horrible. Compounding on the

disregard of Alice's will, Madeline hopes that Alice's body can be revived by the fungus. Her plan for Alice's body was foiled only because Alice's brother incinerated it. It is Madeline who thoughtlessly removes Alice's autonomy. At this point, the fungus could not talk yet through Madeline's body, she is, therefore, the one to ask this of Alice. By being in a symbiotic state with the fungus, Madeline can even direct its control over the autonomy of the death and immortality of others. Leaving them at its mercy, perhaps even indefinitely.

Under these circumstances, immortality does not seem exactly desirable anymore – as immortality means sharing one's mind and body with the fungus forever. Death is not just an end for Alice and the narrator but an escape from the fungus' control. Before, it was not apparent that the all-encompassing grip of the fungus did not extend completely to death and immortality as it becomes apparent that the death and incineration of a human host removes the fungus' control. Aside from their own deaths, the characters figure out later that there are only two other viable methods of escape: first, fire and second, abandoning the Usher house, which is of course only a stopgap.

Infected Nature and Fungus-Destruction

In Poe's original story, the fungus is only mentioned twice. First, when the Usher's home is described as overgrown by fungi, "hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves" (Poe 93) and second, when Roderick's belief in the "sentience of all vegetable things" (100) is portrayed. In contrast to the literal and metaphorical house in Poe's story, which was overgrown by the fungus, in Kingfisher's novel, it is taking over everything. So much so that the house itself becomes a fungus: "The house squatted over it [, the lake,] like the largest mushroom of them all" (7). Therefore, the house is not simply a manmade, secure environment, but from the very beginning it is composed of what might very well kill its inhabitants, invoking even more the desolate manor setting of the gothic novel. Further, the house is not just personified by being described as only one face

as in Poe's story, but "a great many faces lined up together or it was the face of some creature belonging to a different order of life – a spider, perhaps, with rows of eyes along its head" (8). This implies that this building, which stands for the human family in Poe, might now be something else that does not fall with its humans in the end but is burned to the ground by them because it is less human and more of an alien entity. In the retelling, the fungus is not just growing around the house, symbolizing the danger to the family, but it grows literally within the family, out of Madeline's body, and has become a sentient being.

In Kingfisher's narrative, the house features an uncontaminated water source, which is used for drinking water by the residents. This prevents them from being infected, because they consequently have not come into contact with the lake water, unlike Madeline (156). Similarly to Madeline, only the animals that consumed water from or were in the lake are poisoned. The symbolism of the house containing an untainted water source suggests that there is still hope for the Usher family, evidenced by Roderick outliving his sister, in contrast to the events in Poe's novel.

In the following, I turn to the house and its surroundings and the fungus' contamination of water and food sources and its control over animal bodies. Hereby, the question is raised of how the presence of the fungus might negatively impact the rest of the nature surrounding the house. By contaminating food and drink, the fungus turns that which should sustain the body's regular functions into something that bestows death and perhaps immortality. You take it in when you eat and drink so that, in the end, the characters are worried that they have all been infected. However, they have been using the uncontaminated water source in the house (156) and, therefore, they remain free of the fungus. Further, the meat that had been procured is not infected because the narrator specifically avoids the infected animals by walking off the immediate grounds of the house and the lake the fungus originated from (48). Yet, the fish they catch have all been infected due to them living in the fungus-infected tarn, shown when Angus catches one and reports that it had "a gob of stuff trailing out of it […] it were all through with stuff like slimy felt" (59–60). Interestingly, nobody

questions if the fungus infected grains or other plants; a question that remains unasked and unanswered but adds to the uncertainty of where the fungus is coming from and how dangerous it is.

Even though the characters find the fungus in dissected fish and hares, the contamination does not appear central to how they are affected by the fungus besides it being an issue of food safety for them (humans). However, the hares, Alex encounters, exemplify how the fungus is indeed a problem for other parts of nature. A hare's movements are described as a first clue: the hare "finally […] did move, but not like any four-legged animal I'd ever seen. It put out one front foot and seemed to drag itself forward, then the other. Then one hind foot, catching up, then the other. It looked like a man scaling a sheer cliff, but on level ground" (58–59). As with Madeline, the fungus has not yet figured out how to control the hare's movements in a proper way. The fungus affects the mortality of the hares as demonstrated, for example, when Alex kills a hare, and he is appalled "when the dead hare began to crawl away" (88). Consequently, the horror aspects are not merely limited to the humans but spread to other creatures as well. The narrator's horse is also feared to be infected at one point, making the narrator worry that he killed his horse "by bringing him here" (124). This highlights how the infection of nature not only contaminates food sources but also affects loyal companions. The infection of the animals raises again more questions: if they are already dead but still being animated by the fungus, (how) will they procreate? How will the fish in the lake or the bovine on the fields survive as species? Then, when thinking about the unknown and a possible further and wider spread of the fungus, more existential questions considering the overall future of the story world are raised. These questions remain open at the end of the novel; like the question of what happens after the house has been burned down and the lake has been cleansed, but the fungus lives on inside the area's animals.

As the spread of the fungus is unclear, nothing guarantees its destruction. Therefore, instead of a clear-cut ending, the finale contains an implied question mark. The story ends with the alleged triumph of the humans over the fungus in the lake which they killed with a Sulphur fire. However, Alex requests a guard to be posted

at the lake in case of "any animals coming to the water to drink" and orders to "shoot them and burn the bodies" (160). This shows that he is aware that they do not know if the fungus has survived and might spread again (154). It is the unknown which establishes another looming horror: It is known that the fungus can spread if someone drinks contaminated water, but can it spread through the air or infected meat? Can it spread from one mammal to another, or is the water as a medium needed? Is there another way to kill it besides fire? As Alex reflects: "Surely if the water had been boiled for tea, it would be safe. Surely" (153). It might be safe to drink the tea, but it might also infect you. These questions are never answered.

Involuntary Posthumanism

In this unknowability, I suggest, the fungus is reminiscent of alien invasions in science fiction, functioning as an unknown threat which needs to be understood to be fought. Referring to something alien, a passage at the end of the book is particularly interesting when the narrator muses: "But it wasn't evil that I was seeing here, it was alien, a monstrous alienness so far removed from what I understood that every fiber of my being screamed to reject it, to run, to get it *away*…" (146; original emphasis). This remoteness of the fungus from human understanding could only be bridged by Madeline, who might have answers and could resolve the horror of the unknown but who is primarily loyal to the fungus. At the same time, the fungus is also a threat from the inside. It stems from the lake, which is on the grounds, right next to the house, while the question of agency and whether Madeline's mind is still her own are reminiscent of the real parasite funghi cordyceps (see Petruzzello), which grows in ants and controls their movements. Both outside and inside threat connect the fungus back to the body horror aspect. Furthermore, a fungus like this raises the question of posthumanism, an aspect connected to ecocriticism, which leads to the question of whether the Madeline-fungus hybrid is still human. Serpil Oppermann argues that posthumanism is not something that should solely "evoke

considerable angst" (275). While this might be true for Madeline, as she is voluntarily sharing her body with the fungus, for all other characters, in this context, it is not just posthumanism but involuntary posthumanism. A state which could last forever, is mostly a great unknown, and, therefore, some apprehension might be a reasonable response.

Conclusion

In *What Moves the Dead*, the fungus is a source of horror, death, and immortality, and the characters become aware throughout the story that it, or nature itself, might be inescapable. The fight against it might not be won. In this article, the aspects of sentience and absorption, as well as of death and immortality, have been observed regarding the motif of the fungus. Both the outside and inside threat of the fungus (coming both from outside the body and being ingested into the body) connect the fungus back to the body horror aspect. Furthermore, the fungus infecting Madeline foregrounds the notion of posthumanism, an aspect connected to ecocriticism, that leads to the question whether the Madeline-fungus hybrid is still human. Now that the sequel, *What Feasts at Night*, has been published, further exploration of the ecohorror concept in Kingfisher's work could include this novel or other novels by her, like *A House with Good Bones* and *Byrony and Roses*, both novels featuring particularly aggressive roses. *What Feasts at Night* does not answer the questions mentioned here. It depicts the narrator returning to his home country and encountering another horrific mystery. The aspects of gender roles and class could not be exhaustively explored in this article; therefore, future research could continue here.

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Depressed Immortals: Immortality and Ecocriticism in Brandon Sanderson's *Elantris*

Aylin Dilek Walder

Brandon Sanderson's Elantris *(2005) exemplifies how fantasy fiction may reflect on the contemporary way of life, as the immortal protagonists' situation in the novel comments on the present depression epidemic and its relation to the entanglement of the urban and nature. Further, the notion of nature and human being opposites is negated, and their oneness foregrounded instead. Based on the idea of a coexistence in symbiosis, the importance of humanity's connectedness to nature and the urban environment is highlighted. By drawing upon the notion of an extended self, Sanderson presents his readers with a work that is in line with deep ecology.*

Brandon Sandersons Elantris *(2005) verdeutlicht, inwiefern sich Fantasy auf heutige Lebensweisen beziehen und diese reflektieren kann. Die Situation der Unsterblichen kommentiert dabei die gegenwärtige Depressionsepidemie im Zusammenhang mit der Verflechtung von Mensch, Stadt und Natur. Hier wird die Vorstellung, dass Natur und Mensch Gegensätze sind, negiert und stattdessen ihre Einheit in den Vordergrund gestellt. Auf Grundlage der Idee von Koexistenz in Symbiose wird die Bedeutung der Verbundenheit des Menschen sowohl mit der Natur als auch mit der städtischen Umwelt hervorgehoben. Der Idee des erweiterten Selbst folgend, spiegeln sich in Elantris Ansätze der deep ecology.*

Introducing a Re-imagined Urban Ecology

In times of anthropogenic climate change, the binarism of Nature as space versus civilisation as the place where humans exert control (over nature) negates human dominance in favour of a re-mystification of Nature that foregrounds human inferiority in the face of climate catastrophes (Parker); however, approaching Nature as the dark sublime may also lead to the reduction of Nature to

being seen as just a threat to human survival.[1] While there are fantasy narratives that primarily evoke eco-anxieties through the negative sublime of life-threatening Nature (Walder), in this article, I propose that nature nevertheless can and should be an acknowledged part of the concrete jungles of the contemporary city, as the natural world affects humans and their urban living spaces alike. Instead of approaching N/nature as separate from the urban, I demonstrate how humans remain dependent on a life in unison with both nonhuman Nature and cultivated nature. Hereby, my examination of Brandon Sanderson's fantasy novel *Elantris* follows the attempts of social ecocriticism and urban ecology in bringing the notions of nature and urban together. Pertaining to psychological research on the positive influence of the entanglement of nature in the urban on mental health, I will then reflect on the importance of nature-connectedness in relation to place-connectedness and outline how medical and psychological research findings have found a foothold in genre fiction.

Without any inherently nature-oriented emphasis, Sanderson's *Elantris* could be easily dismissed by ecocriticism as being too concerned with the subjective and social. Following Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace's example in *Beyond Nature Writing*, however, Greg Garrard advocates for a more prominent inclusion of genre fiction in the field of ecocriticism; that is, he deems the ecocritical value of texts without an "obvious environmental dimension" ("Introduction" 18) as equal to those texts with which ecocriticism has been primarily concerned from the outset – as claims have been made for nonfiction and poetry (*Ecocriticism*). Nevertheless, most contemporary works are still excluded from ecocritical studies, as ecocritics "expect of writers that they inscribe ecological viewpoints in their work" (Oppermann, "Ecocentric" 230), and thus the main focus remains on direct descriptions and presentations instead of asking how ecocriticism can enter various texts. When focusing on the way the environment and nature enter a text – thereby defining ecocriticism in inclusive terms and following Serpil Oppermann's

1 Parker capitalises Nature in order to acknowledge the difference between Nature as space, a world of the nonhuman defying human control, as opposed to nature as a place that has been cultivated by humans (7–8).

argument for an enlightening and postmodern study of genre fiction ("Theorizing") – Sanderson's story can indeed be approached from an ecological perspective that provides insight into the contemporary relation between the human, the urban, and nature. Here, the notion of deep ecology as an "environmental philosophy" that understands the human "as centrally embedded in, rather than apart from, the natural world" (Snyder 8) underlies the representation of the human (dis)connection to nature in the novel. This enables an ecocritical approach insofar as Sanderson points his readers to the importance of being sensitive to one's union with nature.

Whereas postcolonial readings and the construction of alterity are arguably more obvious approaches to Sanderson's work, the fantasy world of *Elantris* also lends itself to a particular ecocritical reading concerning the question of how the global health issue of the depression epidemic, as Jonathan Rottenburg calls it, is connected to humanity's maladaptation to its environment, that is the present imbalance between urbanisation and the natural world. Instead of arguing for a *return* to nature, the plot then highlights how nature sensitivity can lead to improved life in urban spaces while further pointing to the necessity to revalue the triangular relation between people, cities and nature in order for depression rates to decline (Bratman et al.). Considering how ecocriticism is embedded in the text as a whole instead of seeking direct descriptions of the same, a focus on nature-connectedness is supported by the main setting of the novel, namely the urban space of Elantris. A reading of the novel that is informed by the coexistence of the urban and nature can then address how the entanglement of nature in the urban may result in improved mental health – and thus avoiding the anti-ecological reasoning of "going back to nature" that reduces nature to a simplistic comparison with human civilisation (Garrard, "Introduction" 6).

In order to argue that the novel reflects on the relation between depression and environment, I will first demonstrate the likeness between the Elantrians and people suffering from hope-

lessness depression.[2] Then, introducing the concept of place- and nature-connectedness, the connection between mental health and the entanglement of the urban and nature is illustrated. Based on urban ecology, the importance of nature-sensitivity is highlighted, emphasising the link between humans and their urban living space. Rather than advocating for a life *in* nature, the novel reflects on how one can live in an urban space while still mentally benefiting from nature-connectedness, for which the idea of self-realisation as the recognition of "one's personhood as tied to the cosmos" (Naess qtd. in Snyder 9) is fundamental.

The Mentally Ill Elantrians and Their Social Exclusion

While the issue of mental health enters the text through the immortal Elantrians, their state of immortality leading to hopelessness depression is due to a previous shift in their transformation, which is presented right at the start of the novel as follows:

> Elantris was beautiful, once. It was called the city of the gods: a place of power, radiance, and magic. [...] Yet, as magnificent as Elantris was, its inhabitants were more so. [...] Legends claim that they were immortal, or at least nearly so. [...] They were divinities. And anyone could become one. The Shaod, it was called. The Transformation. It struck randomly [...] [and] the fortunate person's life ended and began anew; he would [...] move to Elantris [...] and be worshipped for eternity. Eternity ended ten years ago. (*Elantris*)[3]

Set in Arelon, a feudalistic country with corrupt leadership, the plot of *Elantris* unfolds ten years after an event called the Reod, after which the divine eternity described in the Prologue comes to an end as the Shaod now turns humans into living corpses instead of divine immortals. Following the Reod, those unfortunate to be

2 Even though the Elantrians are immortal, they are referred to as human instead of nonhuman in this article. Being representative for contemporary humanity, these human-like immortals are then shown to be entangled with the urban and nature (nonhuman matter/materiality).

3 In Brandon Sanderson's *Elantris*, the pagination is inconsistent. The quote is from the Prologue, for which no page numbers are displayed.

affected by the transformation are then cursed with endless pain as their bodies are unable to function normally. Although the humans attribute the incomplete transformation to the Reod, they are uncertain of its true nature. It is only towards the end of the novel that they discover that the Reod is actually an earthquake that altered the landscape.[4]

While the Elantrians have been worshipped before, they become outcasts confined to the city of Elantris as they "lost their right to be men [and] are animals" (Sanderson 102), according to the religious group serving Jaddeth. First, this statement establishes a hierarchy in the novel that favours humans over animals, contradicting the idea of the human being "with and of the Earth" which recognises that "the biotic and abiotic powers of this Earth are the main story" (Haraway). Second, the comment demonstrates that humanity's disconnection from nature is evident not only in the overall plot, as outlined below, but also in the descriptions of the Elantrians that certain members of Arelish society use to devalue them as they disturb their civilised society. As the urban environment is a human-controlled place, unpredictability – that which the human cannot control, civilise, or order – is undesired and must be excluded. The Reod is uncontrollable and lacks any discernible system, leading to unpredictability in the civilisation of Arelon. Due to its negative effects on humans, a significant portion of the fictional society feels the need to mark those affected as inferior (similar to how they view animals) in order to justify the Elantrians' exclusion from society. In Elantris, the enclosed city of these dehumanised exiles, the immortals then enter a depressive state of mind whereby their transition from mortality to immortality echoes the juxtaposition of "the vulnerable natural world of the organic and the changing with that of the hard, precious world of fixity and permanence" (Klotz 30). Here, the desire for permanence and fixity – both associated with immortality (Klotz) – is mocked insofar as the immortal's fixed state does provide neither security nor comfort, instead leading to an assumed endless suffering. This

4 Regarding this newly gained nature-sensitivity, see the section "Place-Connectedness and the Entanglement of the Human and the Urban with Nature" below.

then comments on the vulnerability of the human and the futility of desiring control and permanence.

The term *depression* entails a multitude of meanings for different research fields, which points to the difficulty of defining the illness in clear-cut terms as it often remains invisible. For this article, the notion of depression as being in a particular state of mood is applied. This can cover "the most catastrophic of states . . . [of being] unable to get out of bed, unable to work, unable to self-care, and even consumed by thoughts of death" (Rottenburg 12). In contrast to mental illness as "the occurrence of disorder of cognition, affect, and behavior", the World Health Organization defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which [an] individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contribution to his or her community" (Bratman et al. 2). The idea that the Elantrians may suffer from mental illness then becomes evident when other characters describe those who underwent the disfiguring transformation some time ago. Their inability to function in a normative, productive or fruitful way is well reflected when Galladon – a rather 'new' and yet undepressed Elantrian – explains to another protagonist called Raoden that the Hoed are

> those Elantrians who had succumbed to the pain. Their minds lost, their lives were filled with continual, unrelenting torture. They rarely moved, though some had enough feral instinct to remain crouched in the shadows. Most of them were quiet but few were completely silent. As he passed, Raoden could hear their mumbles, sobs, and whines. Most seemed to be repeating words and phrases to themselves, a mantra to accompany their suffering. (Sanderson 44)

The reader is here confronted with a population marked by a numbness that lets them only occasionally "bob toward the surface of what [they] had once called consciousness" (579). Besides exhibiting the typical invisible symptoms of depression, the mental illness is further reflected in the changes in appearances of the Elantrians as their hair turns "limp gray" and their skin becomes "covered with sickly black patches, like dark bruises" (4); both apparent changes mark them as inherently Other. Here, it is of particular interest that

even though depression is an illness that has no bodily markers and remains "invisible and incalculable" (Rottenburg 2), the text makes it visible. In Sanderson's world, it is not only the mind that suffers but the body as well. Further, the distressed body is closely entwined with the affliction of the mind: "every cut, every nick, every bruise, and every ache – they will stay with you until you go mad from the suffering" (Sanderson 10).

Referring back to my introduction and the remark that *Elantris* offers a multitude of readings, this new way of representing a mental illness highlights the aptitude of this particular work, and popular fiction in general, for addressing social questions in a unique way; here, the problem of depression being invisible and the dismissal of those suffering from it is commented on. The bodily markers mentioned above clearly identify those suffering from depression, which makes it rather difficult for the fictional society to look the other way, that is to ignore that something went wrong. Rather than questioning the cause of the 'depression' and the changes that have occurred, the 'healthy' society chooses to exile the Elantrians, similar to how mentally ill individuals are institutionalised in the real world. Here, I do not intend to criticise institutionalisation per se as there are cases in which individuals may profit from such intense care. However, the 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude without caring to look deeper into the reasons of, for instance, the depression epidemic remains problematic. Hence, the persecution and mistreatment of the disfigured Elantrians can be seen as a comment on the social exclusion of mentally ill individuals that disregards the larger causes for mental illnesses.

Hopelessness Depression and Personal Condemnation

Beyond the visible depiction of depression as an illness, the Elantrians display a particular kind of depression that is linked to their fate of being exiles forced to live apart from their families in the enclosed ghetto of Elantris. After years in isolation without any hope of finding a possible cure for their pain – most do not even have the capacity to think properly anymore, let alone to search for a cure –

the Elantrians lose hope for a better life. Throughout the text, this loss of hope is prominently pointed to, so that the notion of *hopelessness depression*, a subtype of depression, can be further considered when examining the state of the Elantrians. In the field of clinical psychology, depression is regarded as a response of the human mood system to the environment. Here, the idea of hopelessness depression follows the basic assumption that the way an individual responds to negative life events is related to the likelihood of that same individual developing depression. In their study, Liu et al. propose that there are three "inferential tendencies in response to a negative event", whereby each individual infers either "stable and global causes", "negative consequences" or "negative self-characteristics" (347) from a negative event; only when the event relates to the particular inferential style of an individual, hopelessness depression is engendered.

Since most Elantrians "thought that they were damned, and assumed that nothing could save their souls from rotting away like Elantris itself" (Sanderson 165), the negative cognitive style of the Elantrians is foregrounded. Instead of hoping or working for a better life, most Elantrians regard themselves as damned upon entering the city. Their hopelessness thus stems from their negative cognitive style, which seeks to explain the negative life event of the Shaod in terms of their personal condemnation. Replacing this negative self-assessment with a more positive inferential style – for example inferring the Reod to unstable natural causes unrelated to oneself – may indeed "produce an ameliorative effect on the individual's sense of hope and mood" (Liu et al. 349). While one could argue that the loss of hope among the Elantrians is understandable regarding their endless suffering, the text also points out that

> The city needs a sense of purpose. [...] Everyone's convinced that their lives are over just because their hearts stopped beating. [...] We need to convince ourselves we can go on. The Shaod isn't causing all the pain here – [...] people on the outside lose hope too, and their souls end up just as emaciated as those poor wretches in the square. If we can restore even a tiny bit of hope to these people, then their lives will improve drastically. (Sanderson 123–24)

Thus, the text directly points to the Elantrians' pain being also caused by a loss of hope, as the quote above highlights that it is not only the failed transformation due to the altered Shaod and the resulting fixed form of the Elantrians but especially their hopelessness that causes them pain. After having established the assumption that the Elantrians suffer from hopelessness depression made visible, in the following, I relate their depressive state of mind and body to place- as well as nature-connectedness, which in turn leads to a reading of the novel that follows the strand of social ecocriticism as well as urban ecology (Bracke).

Place-Connectedness and the Entanglement of the Human and the Urban with Nature

For the purpose of this article, the notion of place is considered an environmental as well as an identity-shaping category, following Buell's conception of places having various dimensions. Here, it is imperative to distinguish between urban places, nature as green or blue places that the human assumes to be in control of, and Nature as a survival-threatening space that remains free from human control (Parker); below, I use *place* to particularly refer to the concrete jungle of the urban, while I apply *nature* to the collective of the external physical world that stands in close relation to the urban; that is *Nature* as negative sublime is backgrounded in favour of *nature* in the urban. Although nature-connectedness and place-connectedness refer to two different kinds of environment, both are entangled and equally related to mental health. Similar to nature-connectedness, place-connectedness is defined as an inherent connection to "what we feel *with* and *around*, *under* and *above*, *before* and *behind*" (Buell 61; original emphasis). The lack of place-connectedness is then assumed to have what Buell describes as "a pathological effect" (75), which produces an environmental notion of place that affects the well-being of a given population.

That populations are closely tied to their urban environment is highlighted in the novel when Raoden looks upon Elantris and notices that "[i]t seemed unnatural to look at Elantris from the out-

side. Raoden belonged in the city. It was as if he stood outside of his own body. [...] He should no more be separated from Elantris than his spirit should be separated from his body" (Sanderson 487). Here, it is first and foremost place-connectedness and not the connection to nature that is underlined. Instead of being emotionally attached to the surrounding nature, it is the urban environment that claims the protagonist's feeling of belonging and connection whereby he for now displays a strong relation to the urban. Referring to Buell's conception of place, the characters in the novel represent the idea that the urban environment is not humanity's Other but rather "part of our being" (55). This notion reflects Bennett's emphasis on vibrant materiality, which assumes an inherent interconnectedness between all matter, and enables a relation of the urban ecology as presented in *Elantris* to nature-connectedness and the concept of deep ecology. Introducing Haraway's Chthulucene and Alaimo's "thinking across bodies" (4), focusing on human matter, Buell's idea of the entanglement of the human and the urban re-centres the intrinsic link between all "biotic and abiotic powers" (Alaimo 4) on the urban.

For an understanding of the triangle relation between the human, the urban, and nature in Sanderson's fictional world, the concept of *Dor* as a natural energy is introduced, which entangles both urban place and the human – represented here by the immortals – with nature:

> Dor is the unseen power – it is in everything, but cannot be touched. It affects nothing, yet it controls everything. . . . There must be some link between Elantrians and the Dor – it feeds our bodies, providing the energy we need to survive. . . . Not only that – but there must be some sort of link between this land and the Dor. (Sanderson 276–77)

Thus, the all-encompassing Dor relates to the idea that one cannot come into being without being in tune with nature. This is demonstrated by the natural energy of Dor feeding the human mind and body, indicating that nature underlies all aspects of existence. Hence, the concept of nature-connectedness enters the text insofar as not only the Elantrians but also their urban place itself is linked to nature through the notion of Dor as a life-giving energy,

which in turn means that Dor interrelates the Elantrians with the land, that is nature, as well. By becoming sensitive to the energy provided by nature, the Elantrians thus practice nature-connectedness. In the following section, I will examine how Sanderson's novel discusses the malpractice of nature-connectedness as well as the healing properties of regained nature-sensitivity, based on the entanglement of the human (Elantrians), the urban (Elantris), and nature as energy (Dor).

AonDor and Healing from Hopelessness Depression through Regained Nature-Sensitivity

In addition to the Dor-energy, the concept of AonDor is introduced: AonDor is an alphabet of signs that are drawn in the air to release the Dor so that one can, for example, produce light or heal injuries with the help of natural energy. Here, the selves of the Elantrians are shown to be interdependent with nature and its energy. This aligns with deep ecology's understanding of the notion of self as including "other organisms, and all that supports them, as part of one's own identity" (Clark 39; cf. Bennett and Haraway). The ability to use the Dor by drawing Aons was, however, reserved for the Elantrians from the past who were mentally and physically healthy, that is sensitive to nature. Since the Elantrians show visible signs of an illness, they are unable to connect to nature's energy, hinting at a general disconnect from their natural environment. While the Elantrians have exercised control over nature in the past by utilising the Dor, their current inability to access the Dor indicates that their control has always been limited and dependent on their nature-sensitivity. Similarly, in contemporary society, we may attempt to cultivate nature to exert some level of control over it, but natural catastrophes such as earthquakes demonstrate that complete control remains an illusion. The growing awareness of our limited control over nature and the inherent link between nature and health, especially the importance of human interaction

with nature (Bressane et al. 1), is hence reflected in Sanderson's fantasy through AonDor.[5]

The entanglement of the urban and nature then becomes particularly foregrounded when the main characters notice that there is one Aon underlying all Aons, which is essentially a map of the land: "Each one [of the Aons] had the three basic lines – the coast line, the mountain line, and the dot for Lake Alonoe" (Sanderson 504). This is then followed by the protagonists' assessment that something may be wrong with the land. Raoden realises that "[*w*]*hen the Reod occurred, the land cracked.* [...] It caused the crack to the south, and suddenly all of the Aons were invalid – they all needed an extra line to function. All of AonDor, and therefore Elantris, would have fallen immediately" (507; original emphasis).

Hence, when the natural environment changed but the humans failed to adapt the Aons so that all still mirror the land, their ability to use nature's energy subsided. After becoming finally sensitive to their environment, the protagonists not only notice that the AonDor mirrors the land, but they also become sensitive to the urban landscape of Elantris, realising that the city was built to represent the Aon that translates as 'Spirit' or 'Soul': "Elantris. Four walls forming a square. The four outer cities surrounding it, their border circles. A straight road leading from each city to Elantris" (583). Since the earthquake changed the landscape, Elantris is not an image of the environment any longer, just as the Aons were no longer a mirror of the land, and therefore the city lost its spirit; only after Raoden "finished his line in the dirt [...] Light exploded from the ground. And [...] the pain went away. The city complex was an enormous Aon – a focus for Elantrian power. All it had needed was the Chasm line to make it begin working again" (592).

The fact that the environment around Elantris changed relates this place to Buell's conception of place, which embraces these entities as "not stable, free-standing [...] but continually shaped and reshaped by forces from both inside and outside" (67) as represented in the novel by the Elantrians themselves and the earthquake.

5 The Mental Health Foundation has themed the *Mental Health Awareness Week 2021* as "Nature: How connecting with nature benefits our mental health", exemplifying the increasing awareness of nature's positive impacts.

When the Elantrians adapt their urban living space as well as their usage of nature's energy by adding another line to the structure of the city as well as to the main Aon of AonDor – the new line representing the chasm that occurred after the earthquake – they heal from their pain and recover from being mentally and physically ill. This reflects the research that shows that a population "can develop a new relationship with the natural world by noticing nature, and that doing so has been found to bring improvements in mental health" (Mental Health Foundation 41). Hence, when the characters notice the change of the landscape as well as the connection between their urban living space and nature as such, they initiate a new relationship with their surroundings that is marked by nature-connectedness and leads to a healing of both mental and physical wounds. The statement by the Mental Health Foundation that "nature connectedness is also associated with lower levels of poor mental health; in particular lower depression and anxiety levels" (5) is thus represented in both the healing of the Elantrians' depressive mood and their physical appearance. Besides, the Elantrians' recovery also reflects the overall benefit of nature-contact as highlighted in a study by Klein et al.: While researching the association between green space and mental health, "the authors found that contact with nature in everyday life significantly associated with decreased levels" (qtd. in Bressane et al. 5) of mental illness. As indicated in section 3, the change in the Elantrians' connection to nature and regained knowledge of the earthquake leads to the adoption of a new inferential style. Instead of inferring their personal condemnation from the Reod, the Elantrians replace their negative self-characterisation with an explanation that is not related to them as beings, which invokes "an ameliorative effect" (Liu et al. 349) that enables the Elantrians to heal from their hopelessness depression.

Resuming the Synthesis of (Urban) Ecology and Fantasy

Conclusively, opposing the approach of nature as something inherently different from the urban, *Elantris* highlights how nature affects humans and their urban environment alike (Bracke). Here, the entanglement of nature with the urban is foregrounded; and instead of representing the contemporary urban way of life negatively, the novel becomes an argument for an urban lifestyle in unison with nature. Additionally, the novel's ending presents the Elantrians, the urban city Elantris and nature not as opposites but parts of the same, which follows Buell's "understanding of the oneness of human and nonhuman" (59). In doing so, the focus remains on a coexistence in symbiosis and a "being [as] being-with" (Morton 302) that relates to the idea of "the close interconnected reality of humans to the cosmos" (Snyder 10). Thereby, the plot follows the ideas of "the extended self" (11) and self-realisation as the recognition of "one's personhood as tied to the cosmos" (Naess qtd. in Snyder 9) as argued for by scholars of deep ecology. Hence, Brandon Sanderson's text somewhat deviates here from the Western understanding of nature and its relation to humans. In Confucianism, for instance, the "inseparability of humans from nature" as well as "the universe [being] a dynamic, ongoing, recess of continual transformation" (Snyder 5) are basic assumptions that clash with the Western thinking in terms of a "spirit/matter or human/nature" (11) split – a split that the plot of *Elantris* also negates. Here, it is imperative to point to the World Health Organisation's presumption that approximately 20% of the Western population in industrialised countries suffer from depression, which makes the issue of mental health a particular problem for urban spaces of the West (Rottenburg).

As the fantastic text tells the story of a change in nature affecting the ability of the immortals to function properly, it further reflects the common agreement across the sciences that the experience of nature as well as one's communion with it has great impact on "cognitive functioning, emotional well-being, and other dimensions of mental health" (Bratman et al. 1). By linking the urban living space of Elantris with nature's empowering energy that is in turn uti-

lised by the Elantrians themselves, a circle of influence between the human, the urban, and nature is created. Just as the Elantrians heal when Elantris is rebound to the environment and the natural energy of Dor, the reduction of mental illness in contemporary urban societies can be effected by a newfound sensitivity for nature. Besides considering the potential impact that changes in nature – as represented in *Elantris* by the earthquake and the Chasm – may have for us, the novel raises questions about the global population's mental health that suffers as nature-connectedness decreases. Studies based on theories such as the Attention Restoration Theory highlight how "nature acts on the improvement of mental fatigue and, in this way, contributes to the recovery of associated mental health problems" (Bressane et al. 2) or that "reduced regular contact with outdoor nature and increased time spent indoors, on screens and performing sedentary activities" (Bratman et al. 3) is linked to mental illness; all of which can be regarded as reflecting on the importance of nature-connectedness for mental health.

Due to its unique approach to the entanglement of the human, the urban and nature, Brandon Sanderson's *Elantris* is a prime example for the possibility of reflecting on the contemporary through the ecocritical reading of genre literature. Following the attempts by social ecocriticism and urban ecology to bring the spheres of nature and the urban together – entangling both notions even though both, at first, seem to be inherently different – the novel displays the property of a cautionary tale for our own relation and connectedness to nature.

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The Ritual of Tellann: Immortality and Its Refusal in Steven Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen*

Tjorven Carstens

While Tolkien presents his immortal people, the Elves, as naturally long-lived paragons of culture and community, Canadian fantasy author Steven Erikson follows a different approach to immortality in his Malazan Book of the Fallen *(1999–2010), in which he conceptualizes his T'lan Imass as teleologically rather than naturally immortal, becoming so at the cost of social cohesion but supposedly for the benefit of others. Constructing a Nietzschean-Adlerian framework for power relations, this paper examines the narrative rhetoric Erikson employs to communicate his vision of the challenges their teleological immortality entails for the T'lan Imass in a world reluctant to buy into their supposedly altruistic motivation.*

Während Tolkien die Elben als sein unsterbliches Volk als von Natur aus langlebige Inbegriffe von Kultur und Gemeinschaft präsentiert, konzeptualisiert der kanadische Fantasyautor Steven Erikson in seiner Reihe The Malazan Book of the Fallen *(1999-2010) die Unsterblichkeit seiner T'lan Imass als teleologisch statt natürlich. Auf der Grundlage einer Kombination von Nietzsches und Adlers Machttheorien beleuchtet dieser Artikel die erzählerische Rhetorik, durch die Erikson seine Vorstellung der Herausforderungen einer solchen zielgerichteten Unsterblichkeit kommuniziert, denen sich die T'lan Imass in einer Welt ausgesetzt sehen, die ihre altruistische Motivation infragestellt.*

Introduction

Whereas the Elves as Tolkien's exploration of natural longevity fill their considerable lifespans with meaningful activities, pursuing for instance proficiency in various arts and crafts, Steven Erikson's conceptualization of an immortal people differs both aesthetically and regarding its purpose. His T'lan Imass, in stark contrast to Tolkien's refined, glamorous Elves, are portrayed as desiccated husks, brutally efficient in combat due to millennia of martial experience

but utterly devoid of existential meaning. Clad in rotting pelts and wielding blades of stone, they represent a bygone age that refuses to accept its own termination. However, rather than being afflicted by an external influence, the T'lan Imass themselves are responsible for their condition, and they propagate the narrative that their pursuit of immortality despite its cultural cost was motivated by altruistic concern for subsequent generations. It is the unique power relations through which Erikson achieves this characterization of the T'lan Imass that is the main subject of this paper, generated from his juxtaposition of the Adlerian categories of individual power and Gemeinschaftsgefühl.

Combining theories on power by Friedrich Nietzsche and Alfred Adler, this paper proposes a framework within which the T'lan Imass's grandiose claim of self-sacrifice can be interrogated by approaching them as a group of individual agents pursuing a communal goal for a specific purpose.[1] After a presentation of the narrative situation including the relevant diegetic markers, the Nietzschean-Adlerian framework facilitates a reading of the Imass's pursuit of immortality as either an act of teleological survival or a manifestation of their metaphysical inferiority complex. Both concepts will be illuminated by placing them in the context of the T'lan Imass's war of extinction against the Jaghut. Utilizing the emerging definition of power as the experience of overcoming resistance (Reginster 127; Soll 123) to trace power relations, the intradiegetic judgment of the Imass's transgression of nature for the purpose of destruction is considered as antithetical to their insistence on doing the world, and more importantly the future, a favour, challenging the reader to manoeuvre the conflicting characterizations of the T'lan Imass as either victims or perpetrators.

1 See Nietzsche's original elaborations on power in *The Will to Power*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, supported by interpretations of the primary texts by Nietzsche scholars Bernard Reginster and Ivan Soll. For Adler's concept of power, see *Understanding Human Nature*.

Meet the Imass: Introducing the Narrative Situation

In Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, the identity of the (T'lan) Imass is not only complicated by its lack of chronological narrative presentation, but also by its contingency on diegetic markers such as places, periods, and characters. A brief introduction to who the Imass are, how they are related to the T'lan Imass, and what role the Ritual of Tellann plays in that relationship thus provides the foundation on which Erikson's narrative exploration of immortality can then be illuminated in the context of Nietzschean-Adlerian theories on power. In order to facilitate access to the complex, temporally multilayered, and narratively scattered history of the (T'lan) Imass, this section presents their origins and subsequent development in chronological order, in departure from their original presentation.

The most relevant and fundamental distinction to make in the context of Erikson's take on immortality as a fantasy staple is that between the Imass and the T'lan Imass. As their strikingly similar names suggest, they are closely related, with the mortal Imass being the precursor species to the immortal T'lan Imass. In order to understand the processes and causes behind their metaphysical shift from mortal to immortal, a closer look at the Imass as a people is required. Presented as a Stone Age people of hunter-gatherers, the Imass inhabit fertile basins rich with game animals – an idyllic existence that becomes complicated by the expansion of the neighbouring Jaghut (Erikson, *Memories* 450). While the Imass are short-lived mortals without metaphysical abilities, the Jaghut enjoy considerable but unspecified longevity and access to a variety of ice magic that is historically and culturally associated with their species (1). As the oppression of the Imass is only presented from the perspective of their own historiography, the reader is unable to validate the extent of the Jaghut's aggression, which the Imass describe as causing them to "live in the shadow of the Jaghut. Tolerated, ignored, but only in small numbers. Pushed to the poorest of lands" (450). Beyond this displacement from their ancestral hunting grounds and the significant infringement on their freedom, Imass historiography further accuses the Jaghut of manipulating the Imass into worshipping them, resulting in "a night-

marish existence – that successive generations were born into and so knew nothing of freedom itself" (450). Not only does this self-characterization serve to establish the Imass as the unmistakable victims in the Imass-Jaghut conflict, it also justifies the vehemence with which they react to their marginalization by the Jaghut.

Although Erikson provides no focalized account of the Ritual of Tellann itself, its role in turning the Imass into the T'lan Imass is nonetheless frequently and consistently referenced. As a metaphysical event, the Ritual of Tellann removes the Imass's souls from their bodies and relocates them to the Hold of Tellann, the metaphysical domain leveraged by their bonecasters, resulting in their teleological immortality (88).[2] The agelessness the Ritual provides the T'lan Imass with is further bound to the Vow of Tellann, a species-wide pledge to wage eternal war against the Jaghut until the threat they pose to the world is removed (3, 451). Like Tolkien's Elves, Erikson's T'lan Imass are immortal in the sense that they do not succumb to processes of biological aging yet may still be killed in battle. However, the T'lan Imass culture stagnates as it exclusively strives for the extermination of the Jaghut, a degeneration symbolized by their change in physical appearance, with the T'lan Imass eventually coming to be desiccated, skeletal husks clad in rotting hides and wielding flint swords to emphasize the indefinite nature of their teleological immortality (Erikson, *Gardens* 256).

Finally, the third period of T'lan Imass history relevant for this paper concerns their response to the conclusion of their war of extinction against the Jaghut, as it fulfils the Vow of Tellann but fails to provide the T'lan Imass with the redeeming sense of accomplishment and identity the T'lan Imass were hoping for (Erikson, *Memories* 610). From its invocation, the Ritual of Tellann is designed to be limited to the war against the Jaghut, to be ended by an event referred to as the "Second Gathering" (250), with the First Gathering being the invocation of the Ritual itself. Rather than being called by the remaining, victorious T'lan Imass themselves, however, the Second Gathering requires the birth of a mortal bonecaster and thus the first mortal representative of the T'lan

2 The Hold of Telann is a metaphysical domain controlled by the so-called bonecasters – a type of shaman in Imass and subsequently T'lan Imass society.

Imass species since its inception. In the context of this Second Gathering, the T'lan Imass, who are at the time *Memories of Ice* takes place usually a footnote or legend referenced by other characters rather than actually represented, return from the marginal role they occupy in Erikson's storyworld to the centre stage. In the context of the Second Gathering, their war against the Jaghut as a self-proclaimed sacrifice for the benefit of all mortal species (451) faces the judgment of the peoples and cultures succeeding the T'lan Imass. It is this renegotiation of the T'lan Imass's role as a teleologically immortal species that facilitates my discussion of the Ritual of Tellann as an act informed by a metaphysical inferiority complex based on the power relations the T'lan Imass engage in. However, relating this narrative situation to the domain of immortality and its refusal require the establishment of a functional framework facilitating the analysis of power relations, which will be presented in the following section.

A Nietzschean-Adlerian Framework for Inter-Individual Power Relations and Their Motivations

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche presents his idea of the will to power as an all-encompassing, necessarily pervasive desire permeating sentient existence, a sentiment finding expression in his aphorism "The world is the will to power – and nothing else!" (Nietzsche, *Power* 1067). Since a definition this general does not facilitate the analysis of the behaviour of individual agents in terms of power, a more specific account of what Nietzsche considers the term 'power' to entail is required. Though Nietzsche's aphoristic style is notoriously open to interpretation, several passages from across his *oeuvre* shed light on the specific structure his ostensibly arbitrary concept of power manifests. At its core, the negotiation of wills to power between individuals resembles a "game of resistance and victory" involving "a little hindrance that is overcome and immediately followed by another little hindrance that is again overcome" (699). In this formulation, Nietzsche emphasizes the interaction between a source of resistance and that which overcomes

it, which corresponds with "the will's forward thrust and again and again becoming master over that which stands in its way" (696). For the purpose of terminological unity, the basic structure of the will to power will thus be understood as a source of impetus seeking to overcome a source of resistance. Nietzsche affords the will to power such a high place in the hierarchy of human aspirations because he claims that "a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs" (Nietzsche, *Morals* I 13) are the underlying principles of human action. This agonistic relationship between the individual and its environment serves the primary purpose of momentarily satisfying the will to power, only for it to identify new resistances, as it "is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance" (Nietzsche, *Power* 696) with its secondary purpose being self-actualisation grounded in the assessment that "all expansion, incorporation, growth means striving against something that resists" (704).[3]

Since Nietzsche's ambiguous aphorisms do not present a conclusive or uniform definition of what exactly the will to power is, or is not, across the entirety of his works, it is prudent to consult the estimation of Nietzsche scholars versed in the field's history of terminological debates and interpretative consensuses. Here, Bernard Reginster provides a useful definitory reduction of the will to power to "the will to the very *activity of overcoming resistance*" (Reginster 127; original emphasis), which aims to settle the debate of what exactly the will to power wills. In slight departure from Reginster's formulation, his fellow Nietzsche scholar Ivan Soll proposes that it is "*the experience of one's power*" that proves most consistently applicable to Nietzsche's various verbalizations (Soll 123; original emphasis). In a reconciliation of the two notions and with respect to the convincing arguments both scholars provide, this paper settles on a definition of the Nietzschean will to power as the will to the

3 Although superficially coextensive, the two purposes constitute a meaningful differentiation under Nietzschean theory. As the fundamental desire underlying human action, the will to power first demands its own satisfaction via the experience of power, but its secondary purpose is the facilitation of personal growth through the mastery of situations in which resistances to "expansion, incorporation, growth" (704) are overcome. Both purposes are essential to the will to power, but the first has to precede the second.

experience of overcoming resistance. In doing so, this paper's approach to power relations is placed on a foundation consistent with Nietzsche's primary text, yet integrated into scholarly discussions from Nietzsche Studies as the corresponding field of experts.

Thus, Nietzsche's will to power offers a useful perspective from which power can be approached as a human universal, providing the agonistic structural formula of power consisting in the experience of overcoming resistance to apply to narrative action. That being said, Nietzsche's focus on the pervasive nature of power rather than its intricacies limits his approach's applicability to inter-individual negotiations of power relations. In order to supplement this deficit of Nietzschean theory, Alfred Adler's individual psychology and its consideration of the individual as a teleological survivor provide helpful categories. Leveraging his experience in clinical psychology and psychiatry, Viennese psychoanalyst Alfred Adler agrees with the main tenets of Nietzsche's will to power. Expanding on Nietzsche's general assessment, however, Adler argues that any pursuit of power is teleological, that is goal-oriented, in nature, with its goal being the acting individual's survival – only upon the completion of which secondary goals may be pursued (Adler 17). On this foundation, Adler deduces that whenever an individual perceives themself as inferior to a challenge arising from their environment, this perceived inferiority is what motivates them to act (29–32). Not only is this formulation more psychologically tangible than Nietzsche's reference to some vague "desire to throw down, a desire to become master" (Nietzsche, *Morals* I 13), Adler maintains that an individual's self-perception as inferior to their surroundings is perfectly normal from a psychological perspective, as it motivates the individual to overcome that undesirable state of inferiority. However, and especially relevant in the context of the T'lan Imass, Adler proposes that repeated failure to overcome the source of the perceived inferiority can cause the individual to develop a pathology referred to as the "inferiority complex" (Adler 174). Agents affected by the inferiority complex then attempt to overcompensate for their repeatedly perceived shortcomings by publicly and frequently seeking to display themselves as experiencing power to counteract their pessimistic self-image of inferiority

(175–76). Regarding the social conduct of afflicted agents, Adler assesses that "life becomes a chain of battles for them" (177) and "human societies do not look with favor upon such beings" (176), which in application to the T'lan Imass's teleological immortality re-characterizes their self-declared "eternal sacrifice" (Erikson, *Memories* 451) as the result of a history of perceived inferiority and failure to remedy that impression, as the next section substantiates.

The Ritual of Tellann as an Act of Teleological Survival, or the Metaphysical Inferiority Complex

Returning to the situation of the Imass preceding the Ritual of Tellann, the Nietzschean-Adlerian framework established above facilitates an analysis of their pursuit of immortality by reducing the dynamics of that pursuit to three major problems and the solutions the Imass conceptualize to overcome them. Firstly, the Imass's general desire to experience power is challenged because they are threatened by the Jaghut as a superior people occupying the same ecological niche. By virtue of this perception of a threat, the negotiation of further power relations, such as territorial expansion, stockpiling for times of need, and the construction of a species-wide self-image as dominant in their niche and thus thriving is frustrated. Following Adler, this perception of inferiority regarding their immediate neighbours and the subsequent marginalization of their people motivates action, in this case martial acts, which demonstrates the Imass's second problem. As the Jaghut have innate, that is, natural, control of the Hold of Omtose Phellack, a potent variety of ice magic capable of devastating Imass lands and thus prohibiting their expansion and procreation, the Imass's martial impetus is not only foiled but results in yet another case of experiencing themselves as inferior. Thirdly and lastly, then, the Imass identify the root cause of their continuous and multi-factored inferiority to the Jaghut in the physical limitations imposed on them by their species, that is, in nature. Not only are their lifespans shorter than those of the long-lived Jaghut, the Jaghut's ice magic also proves a natural counter to their hunter-gatherer lifestyle. It is this recognition

of the Jaghut as a naturally superior enemy, of nature as the final frontier delineating the range of their options against the Jaghut threat, that finally causes the Imass's self-perception of inferiority to turn into an Adlerian inferiority complex, to be rebelled against publicly and frequently, as the Imass then set out to do in spectacular excess.

From the perspective of the negotiation of power relations between Imass and Jaghut, the Ritual of Tellann is no occultist last resort to higher powers in times of desperate need, but emerges as a tailored solution to the three problems just presented. By disconnecting their souls from their bodies and containing them in the Hold of Tellann, the Imass's bodies no longer house their life force and become ageless, if not invincible. Thus, their transformation from Imass to T'lan Imass counteracts both their susceptibility to the Jaghut's ice magic since their bodies are no longer vulnerable to the cold or the frustration of the food supply, which the ice magic causes by extension. Further, their metaphysically extended lifespans now match or even exceed those of the Jaghut. The resolution of their third problem also alleviates the second one of experiencing themselves as martially inferior to the Jaghut, as their successful campaigns against their erstwhile superiors emphasize (e.g. Erikson, *Memories* 4–5). By further extension, this experience of martial superiority due to their metaphysically acquired immortality means that the T'lan Imass manage to solve their first problem, namely the frustration of their negotiation of power relations as a species, by mounting a superior counter-threat against the Jaghut. However, in doing so, the species initially setting out to fight the Jaghut is transformed into something inherently different – no longer socially or culturally active but entirely devoted to their eternal war.

Thus, illuminated by the Nietzschean-Adlerian framework constructed above, the Ritual of Tellann emerges as both an act of teleological survival and the metaphysical manifestation of their inferiority complex. The Imass, now turned into T'lan Imass, achieve immortality for the specific and pronounced purpose of destroying the Jaghut species, which is identified by them as a requirement for their continued survival. The fact that the cost of this survival is

their future and legacy as a people constitutes the tragic core of Erikson's take on immortality. Considering the Ritual of Tellann as a metaphysical manifestation of the inferiority complex from the vantage point of Adlerian theory, however, the T'lan Imass's pursuit of experiencing power over the Jaghut is cast in an even more tragic light, as an entire species foregoes life and all its constructive potential. Not only do the T'lan Imass eradicate another species due to their pathology but abandon their own capability for progress in the process. According to Adler, it is part of this pathology not to acknowledge it and to hide behind an air of self-righteousness (Adler 75). However, over the millennia of their war of extinction against the Jaghut, the T'lan Imass are confronted with the judgment of agents unwilling to buy into the narrative of noble self-sacrifice propagated by the T'lan Imass themselves, as the Jaghut threat fades and the context of the T'lan Imass's abandonment of their future along with it.

Diegetic Judgment of the T'lan Imass and Its Narrative Rhetoric

Focalized via the eponymous Malazan Empire and its contemporaries, the T'lan Imass with their skeletal bodies and outmoded weapons are presented exclusively as a bygone thing, menhirs of warning rather than the wellsprings of inspiration they hoped to be at the inception of the Ritual of Tellann. In terms of diegetic judgment, three primary approaches can be distinguished. Firstly, a representative of the renegade T'lan Imass argues that they erred not in their abandonment of meaningful cultural progress but rather in their choice of target.[4] Instead, they propose that the Jaghut were targeted for the indignation they caused the Imass by manipulating them into worship, causing more threatening foes to go unconfronted and sacrificing their future as a collective for an unworthy cause (Erikson, *Dreams* 1089). Secondly, another faction of renegades, represented in the narrative by the characters Kilava and Onrack, judge their peers' degeneration into immortality and

4 Renegades are members of the T'lan Imass race that break the Vow of Tellann by abandoning the war against the Jaghut.

lament the potential for the meaningful social development their species collectively renounced. Thirdly and lastly, Silverfox, the bonecaster in charge of the aforementioned Second Gathering, passes judgment on the T'lan Imass in her assessment that despite the functional annihilation of the Jaghut, their war is not yet finished and they do not deserve the oblivion they yearn for. This section examines how each of these three perspectives presents the reader with a slightly different assessment of the T'lan Imass's decision to forego cultural progress in their pursuit of immortality, each calling into question the altruistic motivation the T'lan Imass themselves continue to claim.

Kalt Urmanal exemplifies the conviction held by most renegades, namely that it is not the pursuit of teleological immortality for the purpose of overcoming their natural limitations that is an issue, but the fact that the Jaghut were chosen as that war's target not out of necessity but out of wounded pride:

> The Jaghut played games with us. They painted themselves in the disguises of gods. It amused them. Our indignation stung to life became a rage of unrelenting determination. But it was misplaced. In our awakening to their games, they had no choice but to withdraw. […] The wars were not necessary. Our pursuit acquired the mien of true madness, and in assuming it we lost ourselves… for all time. (Erikson, *Dreams* 1089)

Urmanal's critique initially focuses on the *casus belli* he considers unjustified, suggesting that the T'lan Imass sacrificed their future for an empty ideal out of spurned pride, but he continues by pointing out that "[t]he Jaghut were the wrong enemy. The Ritual should have been invoked in the name of a war against the K'Chain Che'Malle.[5] They were the ones who hunted us. For Food. For sport. They were the ones who saw us as nothing more than meat" (1089). Returning to the Adlerian inferiority complex, Urmanal's regret of his people's choice of enemy supports the notion that their war against the Jaghut was never motivated by a reasonable assessment of them as the most threatening foe but dictated by their repeated

5 A species of sentient reptilians, the K'Chain Che'Malle are considered one of the Elder Races alongside the Jaghut and the (T'lan) Imass, and the storyworld's earliest apex predators (Erikson, *Gardens* 660).

experience of inferiority to the Jaghut. Further, the unintentional nature of their victimization by the Jaghut directly contradicts their narrative of selfless sacrifice, as it characterizes the motivating impetus behind their war of extermination as active when it was in fact passive.

While Urmanal contests the target of their war, Kilava and Onrack stand apart from most renegades by questioning the necessity of the Ritual of Tellann as such rather than its direction. Despite being a bonecaster herself and thus having access to metaphysical impetus, Kilava is one of very few Imass who refuse to participate in the Ritual and thus never become T'lan Imass. The fact that she nonetheless participates in the war against the Jaghut underlines her belief in the justice of their mission – but not in the excessive ends her people are willing to go to in its pursuit. Her concern for the irreversibility of her people's decision to become immortal is exemplified in her own eventual conclusion as she states: "I have enough Jaghut blood on my hands" (Erikson, *Memories* 4), although the option of abandoning the Ritual is not open to any of her kin lest they become renegade.[6] While Kilava never becomes immortal, Onrack the Broken, abandoned by his people for being disillusioned with their fixation on the Jaghut as their only source of identity, regains his mortality and rediscovers the joys of mortal life with its sensory delights and the thrill of its perils (Erikson, *Gale* 578). Though he initially also fought the Jaghut, Onrack agrees with Kilava in judging that the T'lan Imass took their war too far, allowing it to dictate the entirety of their conduct as a species, which in his opinion constitutes a loss as severe as any military defeat (Erikson, *House* 1015). While the Imass identified death as the primary cause of their inferiority to the Jaghut, Onrack presents the reader with the teachings of the E'res – the storyworld's first humanoid species, preceding both the Jaghut and the Imass – according to whom it is precisely the necessarily limited nature of humanoid life that provides it with meaning, as

6 Kilava's original decision to not participate in the Ritual and thus become T'lan Imass was motivated by her concern that the reasoning used to justify the war against the Jaghut may eventually expire, leaving her species immortal but bereft of their just cause. Without their moral high ground of defending themselves, she judges their *casus belli* as unjustified.

joint struggle against natural adversities acts as a social cohesive and civilizational accelerant:

> Their power comes […] from layers. Stone shaped into tools and weapons. Air shaped by throats. Minds that discovered, faint as flickering fires in the sky, the recognition of oblivion, of an end… to life, to love. Eyes that witnessed the struggle to survive, and saw with wonder its inevitable failure. (888)

Echoing the Nietzschean assertion that "all expansion, incorporation, growth means striving against something that resists" (Nietzsche, *Power* 704), Onrack's adherence to the teachings of the E'res opposes the T'lan Imass's insistence on the necessity of the Ritual with an altogether different sentiment than those of Kalt Urmanal and Kilava; namely, that rather than seeking meaning in victory at the cost of their sense of community, continuing to struggle as a group would have offered its own benefits. The consideration of this alternative was prevented by the T'lan Imass's inferiority complex.

Lastly, Silverfox as the bonecaster in charge of ending the Ritual at the Second Gathering seeks to instrumentalize the T'lan Imass against yet another enemy instead of releasing them as is her purpose (Erikson, *Memories* 612). Utilizing Silverfox's identity as the first flesh-and-blood T'lan Imass born since the Ritual of Tellann, Erikson presents her as childishly vindictive against the people who abandoned her in pursuit of their war, seeking to punish them by damning them to the warmongering state they chose over her (611). Silverfox's petulant defiance challenges the reader to recognize the ultimate consequence the T'lan Imass's race-wide rejection of communal identity confronts them with, namely that in doing so, they rendered themselves irredeemable from within, as the sense of compassion and social responsibility required to qualify for redemption was sacrificed in the Ritual. In a significant turn of events, Erikson has an outsider show the T'lan Imass the compassion Silverfox refuses them, as Itkovian accepts the pent-up pain accumulated over millennia of meaningless existence, remarking that "compassion is priceless in the truest sense of the word, [i]t must be given freely, [i]n abundance" (873) before he is killed by the

sheer force of the T'lan Imass's suffering.[7] The fact that the T'lan Imass, now relieved of their collective pain, seek to continue their immortal existence, utilizing it to help distant kin in need in their struggles (886), echoes the sentiments expressed by Onrack and Kilava. They identify that the problem afflicting the T'lan Imass has never been their immortality itself, but rather the monolithic alignment of their entire species to the cause of publicly and frequently presenting themselves as experiencing power in an effort to dispel their self-perception of being inferior to the Jaghut.

Conclusion

In their development from a thriving Stone Age culture into an army of desiccated husks in rotting armour, the T'lan Imass exemplify a special kind of fall from grace, as the immortality they metaphysically acquire is what causes their degeneration as a people. Within the Nietzschean-Adlerian framework introduced in this paper, the T'lan Imass's struggle against the Jaghut emerges as personal and eventually pathological once their continuous failure to experience power over their main competitors translates into an Adlerian inferiority complex. By exploring the power relations the Imass, then turned T'lan Imass, engage in, their grandiose claim to a narrative of self-sacrifice for the benefit of all living beings can be recontextualized as an altruistic cover for their genocidal ambitions against the Jaghut.

As the T'lan Imass's war of extinction spans millennia, Erikson's conceptualization of immortality as having a degenerating effect hinges on the fact that the storyworld moves on without them, uninterested in the justifications of fallen warmongers. What is more, Erikson's juxtaposition of T'lan Imass self-representation with the conflicting perspectives of the renegades as well as Silverfox and Itkovian recontextualizes the T'lan Imass's refusal to adhere to the laws of nature in the pursuit of the moral imperative of their quest

7 Introduced earlier in *Memories of Ice*, Itkovian initially serves as the Shield Anvil of the Grey Swords mercenary army, in which capacity it is his duty to shepherd the souls of his comrades fallen in battle over to the afterlife.

as not only a farce but a grave folly, as it strips their culture of all sense of social identity. Erikson's narrative decision to then grant the T'lan Imass not the redemption they seek but a second chance at being a people caring for one another with solidarity and compassion then emerges as another transgression. This time, the reader faces a transgression against the demand for justice, as they are challenged to reconcile the T'lan Imass's history of genocide with their genuine suffering, and the implications Itkovian's focus on the latter has regarding the former.

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Deities of Death in Contemporary Popular Fantasy Media

Kristin Aubel

This paper compares the philosophies of death embodied by death deities from three successful fantasy series with each other through Derrida's and Tolkien's notions of death as a gift. Hades in Percy Jackson *(2005–2009, 2023–present), the Raven Queen in* Critical Role: Vox Machina *(2015–2017), and the Many-Faced God in* A Song of Ice and Fire *(1996–present) all take on various forms, making their true essence a secret. Death can therefore never be fully known. It is fearsome, but also connected to mercy and change. While death is portrayed as inevitable, its finality as well as the deities' impartiality are questioned to varying degrees.*

Dieser Artikel vergleicht die Todesphilosophien, die durch die Todesgottheiten aus drei erfolgreichen Fantasy-Serien verkörpert werden, anhand des Konzeptes von Tod als Geschenk bei Derrida und Tolkien. Hades in Percy Jackson *(2005-2009, 2023-Gegenwart), die Raven Queen in* Critical Role: Vox Machina *(2015-2017) und der Many-Faced God in* A Song of Ice and Fire *(1996-Gegenwart) nehmen verschiedene Gestalten an und machen so ihre wahre Essenz zu einem Geheimnis. Der Tod kann daher niemals wirklich gekannt werden. Er ist angsteinflößend, steht aber auch für Gnade und Veränderung. Obwohl der Tod als unausweichlich dargestellt wird, werden sowohl seine Endgültigkeit als auch die Unparteilichkeit der Gottheiten in unterschiedlichem Maße in Frage gestellt.*

Introduction

Death is a ubiquitous experience of humankind and as such of immense cultural relevance: Imagery of death can be found in most if not all cultures and religions (Vinczeová 67). Often, death is anthropomorphized, making "[p]ersonifications of death [...] some of the oldest stories we have" ("Trope Talk" 1:35). Nowadays, much of fantasy literature is "in one way or another about death" (Gray 1). Since the purpose of death narratives is "to act as subliminal ways of naturalizing the fear of death and dying" (Kundu 10) and since

fantasy "can be a strategy for coming to terms with reality thorough [sic] a process of mourning, rather than merely being a form of delusional escapism" (Gray 5), it will be interesting to investigate how this process is embodied by fantastic death deities. This paper will therefore analyse deities of death in three contemporary fantasy series that are already firmly established and currently being extended. Comparing these three will thus provide an insight into a specific moment of perspectives on death in contemporary cultural production. First, the three series and their respective death deities will be introduced, followed by a brief overview of the idea of death as a gift and a detailed analysis of the philosophies of death embodied and represented by each deity.

Death in Contemporary Fantasy Series

This paper analyses the representations of death in the novel series *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005–2009, 2023–present) by Rick Riordan, the actual play Table-Top Role-Playing Game (TTRPG) series *Critical Role: Vox Machina* (2015–2017) by Critical Role Productions, and the novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996–present) by George R.R. Martin. *Percy Jackson* has multiple follow-up series, such as *Heroes of Olympus* (2010–2014), and a new trilogy continuing the 'original' series starting with *The Chalice of the Gods* (2023). All of Riordan's series take place in the same universe of a contemporary United States of America in which the ancient Greek deities (and later other pantheons) are still present and conceive demigod children (often referred to as "half-bloods") with mortals. The series mostly deal with the quests of adolescent demigods to save the world from evil. The actual play series *Critical Role* takes its play mechanics and the basis of its Tolkien-inspired classical fantasysetting from the TTRPG *Dungeons & Dragons* (5th edition) but establishes its own magical world of Exandria, which has to be saved from various threats by a group of adventurers. *Vox Machina* is its first campaign. In its recently finished third campaign (*Bells Hells*, 2021–2025) as well as several mini-series, Exandria's pantheon of deities is further developed. *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which deals with

intrigues in a fantasy world inspired by the European Middle Ages, consists at present of five novels with Martin (presumably) working on the sixth and seventh volumes, as well as publishing various stories taking place in the world of the series and reference material about it. In all three narratives, a deity of death plays a pivotal role: Hades in *Percy Jackson* changes from an antagonist to a world-saving ally, the Raven Queen in *Critical Role: Vox Machina* imbues the player character Vax'ildan in particular with powerful gifts, and the Many-Faced God in *A Song of Ice and Fire* becomes an essential part of the journey of the character Arya.

This paper focusses on deities of death, referring to personifications that both represent and/or rule the domain of death and are revered and prayed to by others, excluding those personifications that merely fulfil the function of a reaper or psychopomp, that is, of a guide for dead souls.[1] As deities, these characters do not only represent death, but also have power over the process of death, thus revealing its exact conceptualisation. As objects of worship, they furthermore provide projection surfaces for the mortal characters, therefore revealing their attitudes towards death. The characters' agency, however, allows them to react to how they are treated. The three deities analysed in this paper represent varying approaches to the creation of goddesses and gods in fantasy media: Hades is of Greek mythological/religious origin and is embodied as a character. In contrast, the Raven Queen is similarly embodied but of mythopoetic origin. The Many-Faced God is not technically a character, but he is fervently represented by his priests, the Faceless Men, who imbue him with character traits such as gentleness and impartiality (*Crows* 138; *Dragons* 975). The Many-Faced God is thus a death deity of mythopoetic origin who is represented through his followers.

1 Stories with these characters "don't usually have much to say about death as a whole" ("Trope Talk" 4:55–5:00) – as long as they stick to this limited function.

Death as Gift

While death is often a source of fear, as mentioned above, the conception of death as a gift is also well established. In *The Gift of Death* (1995), philosopher Jacques Derrida dissects the relationship between the concepts of responsibility, gift, and death (and – especially religious – secrecy):

> The crypto- or mysto-genealogy of responsibility is woven with the double and inextricably intertwined thread of the gift and of death: in short of the *gift of death*. The gift made to me by God as he holds me in his gaze and in his hand while remaining inaccessible to me, the terribly dissymmetrical gift of the *mysterium tremendum* only allows me to respond and only rouses me to the responsibility it gives me by making a gift of death [*en me donnant la mort*], giving the secret of death, a new experience of death. (Derrida 33; original emphasis)

Death is therefore a gift from God but not necessarily connotated positively since it is dispensed without choice by a higher, "inaccessible" and therefore unaccountable being. Since it is a great (and terrible) secret, death will also always remain an individual, and presumably lonely, experience.

The idea of death as a gift entered fantasy literature based on European mythology through J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55). Similar to Derrida's notion of death, the gift of death in Tolkien's works has a religious, Christian connotation as it is depicted as the gift of the one God to humanity (Sterling 17–18). It is, however, ambivalent, being "bitter to receive" and at the same time "the inevitable counterpart of the gift of life, and nothing to be feared" (17). This duality of grief and acceptance is represented by all three death deities in this paper, albeit in different ways.

Accepting Death: Hades in *Percy Jackson*

In Greek mythology, Hades is the god of the dead and king of the underworld.[2] In the *Percy Jackson* series, he still fulfils this role. His initial characterisation in the first novel is that of an unpleasant, even fearsome, distant loner. He has neither a throne on Olympus nor a cabin in Camp Half-Blood (Riordan, *Thief* 113). These cabins are usually intended as homes for the respective deity's demigod children, but childless major deities such as the virgin goddess Artemis still have an honorary cabin. Hades, however, does not belong: "He sort of does his own thing down in the Underworld. If he did have a cabin here [...] Well, it wouldn't be pleasant. Let's leave it at that" (113). Since World War II is rewritten as "basically a fight between the sons of Zeus and Poseidon on one side, and the sons of Hades on the other" (114), Hades is furthermore associated with the Axis Powers. His great potential for evil thus stated, it makes sense that he is assumed to be the one responsible for stealing Zeus' lightning bolt and so provoking a war between Zeus and Poseidon:

> Someone who harbours a grudge, who has been unhappy with his lot since the world was divided aeons ago, whose kingdom would grow powerful with the deaths of millions. [...] The Lord of the Dead is the only possibility. (143)

Parallelly, the protagonist Percy mourns the (presumed) death of his mother Sally: "My mother was gone. The whole world should be black and cold. Nothing should look beautiful" (59). The existence of an underworld as physical space, however, makes death seem less final (78). In the beginning, death and the god of death are therefore depicted as threats that must be defeated while its counterpart, immortality, seems "like a pretty good deal" (68).

When Percy meets Hades, the initial negative connotations are seemingly confirmed: He is described as having a "mesmerizing, evil charisma" (*Thief* 309). His form, which is "at least three metres tall" (309), makes him intimidating – and intentionally so, as the

2 While Thanatos, the actual embodiment of death from Greek mythology, makes an appearance in the sequel series *The Heroes of Olympus*, his function in this narrative is mostly that of a reaper and subordinate to Hades.

gods can shift their shape at will (*Curse* 37), with their true form being deadly for mortals to see (*Thief* 331). Hades as embodiment of death can thus never be truly known, fitting Derrida's notion of death as a great and terrible secret.

It turns out, however, that Hades does not want a war, as more dead people would merely raise his administrative efforts and costs, implying a rather pragmatic approach towards death, and that his mistrust of the Olympian gods led to him being manipulated by the same twist villain (Kronos) as the protagonists (*Thief* 311–13). While Hades remains antagonistic towards the protagonists, he is re-characterized from a scheming villain to a god of his word: "Even the Lord of Death pays his debts" (345).

In the following novels, both the ostracization of Hades, his children, and thus of death itself and the (ostensible) allure of immortality are further explored and ultimately reversed: Death is revealed as good and immortality as bad. In the third novel, *The Titan's Curse* (2007), it is ironically two not ageing, and therefore virtually immortal, hunters of Artemis, who are the first major deaths in the fight against Kronos. The irony is further amplified by the fact that one of them, Bianca di Angelo, is a daughter of Hades. It is thus made clear that there are no exceptions from death. In the case of Zoë, who has been a hunter for millennia, death is, in opposition to Bianca's here and Sally's in the first novel (*Curse* 198; *Thief* 53), seen as a relief: "Rest. At last" (*Curse* 277). Her immortality, by contrast, is connected to stagnation and the inability to self-improve (203). In the fourth novel, *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2009), this idea is emphasised further: The character Eurythion describes choosing immortality as the "[w]orst mistake I ever made" (160), and Daedalus' life extension methods are described as "not natural" (295) as well as "hiding from death", "cheat[ing] death" (282), and "avoid[ing] death" (295); all negatively connotated word choices. In the end, Daedalus lets himself die, deciding to "trust in the justice of the Underworld, such as it is. That is all we can do, isn't it?" (334–35), associating death (and Hades) with fairness and inevitability.

In the same novel, Bianca's brother Nico, also a child of Hades, struggles to accept his sister's death, constantly trying to summon her spirit. While this is possible, again questioning the finality of

death, this power is, just like Daedalus' immortality, described as "unnatural" (*Labyrinth* 163). Similar to Zoë, Bianca has already accepted her own death (166), and it is the survivors who have to go through an arduous process of grief and anger in order to reach this state – which Nico does at the end of the novel: "Bianca has passed. She must stay where she is" (335).

While the children of Hades thus accept their very limited power over death, they are themselves not welcomed into demigod society because of these powers – they make others "uncomfortable" (*Labyrinth* 296). Since there is no cabin for Hades in Camp Half-Blood, Nico literally does not have a place there (344), and Hera reinforces this notion of not-belonging by stating that neither Hades nor Nico are truly part of the Olympian family (350).[3] Only when Nico convinces his father in the series' finale to join this family together in their fight against Kronos and thus to become the "saviors of Olympus" (*Olympian* 317), the status quo changes: Hades does not receive a throne, but at least a seat on Olympus (346), as well as a cabin in Camp Half-Blood (353), where Nico is finally accepted: "nobody seemed to think this was out of place" (371). In a parallel conclusion to this acceptance of death, immortality is rejected: At the end of the series, Percy is offered to become an immortal god himself, but he refuses this gift (351), deciding against stagnation and for change and ultimately death: "I didn't want things to stay the same for eternity, because things could always get better" (373).

Throughout the series, the characters' attitude towards death slowly changes, which is mirrored by their attitude towards Hades and his children. Initially portrayed as fearsome, acceptance of death and its representatives becomes connotated with the natural order of things. As characters, Hades and Nico themselves have agency in this development. While both act at times antagonistically (also in response to how they are treated), they ultimately decide and prove to be valuable and powerful allies. Immortality meanwhile turns out to be more of a curse than a blessing. This development mirrors other fantastic children and young adult literature

3 In Greek mythology, Hades is indeed not an Olympian but a Chthonic god. This series, however, moralizes this distinction and uses it to discuss conceptualisations of family and familial unity.

(CYAL), as these novels "help readers to form an (almost) angst-free outlook on death" (Kokorski 356).[4]

Death as Powerful Gift: The Raven Queen in *Critical Role: Vox Machina*

During *Critical Role: Vox Machina*, the character Vax'ildan (or Vax) sacrificed himself close to when his player, Liam O'Brien, lost his mother: "But his character's story was 'one of accepting a fate that he fell into,' and that helped O'Brien process the same problem" (More), highlighting that TTRPGs can fulfil a similar cathartic function as CYAL. In their study on playing death in *Dungeons & Dragons*, Sidhu and Carter note that "[f]or two of our participants, death in *D&D* had provided an explicit outlet to reflect on and come to terms with a real-life death they had recently faced" (Sidhu and Carter 1056). In *Vox Machina*, this journey of acceptance is closely tied to Vax's relationship with the goddess of death, the Raven Queen or Matron of Ravens.

The Raven Queen as she appears in *Vox Machina* is a modified version of the character from the Forgotten Realms setting of *Dungeons & Dragons*' 5th edition. Having successfully ascended as a mortal to replace the former god of death, she is the current deity of death, winter, and fate ("Duskmeadow" 57:08–45). Although she is merely in charge of the transition from life to death and does not rule over an underworld (58:11–13), she does exceed the function of a reaper as she determines the conceptualisation of death in this world: She "has taken what was once a tyrannical position of death and afterlife and souls and took it instead as the natural transition that it is" (57:45–55). This notion of death as natural is not the only similarity between the Raven Queen and the portrayal of Hades in *Percy Jackson*. She also is a keeper of her word and is mistrusted by the other gods ("Chapter" 1:32:28; "Duskmeadow" 58:08), making both of them outsiders within their respective pantheon.

4 Kokorski herself refers to, for example, *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, *House of Night* by P.C. and Kristin Cast, and *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling.

The Raven Queen is able to shapeshift and appears in various forms, for example as a spectre in "a dark female form" ("Tomb" 4:30:20) with a "formless" and "blurred" face (4:31:32–42) or during a ritualistic communion as a "massive form" with a "porcelain face like a mask, long jet-black hair, her body encasing you like a physical cage" ("Family" 55:00–08). The Raven Queen's shapeshifting and unknown face is strongly tied to questions of power and identity, as she, similar to Hades, uses her shapes to exert power while and through hiding her true form. She and Hades thus both fit Derrida's idea that death will always be a secret.

The Raven Queen is very much aware of how mortals see her, and while she reacts much more gently and understandingly to this rejection than Hades, her reasoning why death is good and necessary is very similar to the one in *Percy Jackson*:

> I know that you hate me. I know that you fear me. Most do. But only because they are without understanding. Without death, life has no meaning. Finality drives change, innovation, greatness. It is the end that I bring that drives all of your gracious creations of this land to make the world better than we did, than those before me did. ("Duskmeadow" 1:09:44–10:16)

While it is ironic that someone who has overcome their own mortality now advocates for the finality of life,[5] her own experiences make her more sympathetic towards mortals: "I understand the impulse of mortality" ("Chapter" 1:32:05). This understanding in connection with her dominion over fate makes her comparatively flexible regarding the exact moment and the finality of death: "[D]eath is sacred. But not all deaths are destined, in that moment. Some destinies require one to endure beyond the moment. To meet that moment many times before the final death is to come" ("Duskmeadow" 1:11:44–56).[6] Practices of necromancy and undeath, however, are rejected as "abomination" (1:11:24–29).

5 In contrast to the bitter immortals in *Percy Jackson*, there is no indication here that the Raven Queen regrets her ascension. On the contrary, by advocating like this, she strengthens her position and protects herself from possible imitators.

6 This statement also refers to the game mechanics of *Dungeons & Dragons*, where characters can theoretically be resurrected with a single spell such as Revivify ("Tomb" 4:26:37), although some game masters make this harder (4:27:41) or even impossible in order to make death less trivial (Sidhu and Carter 1055).

The Raven Queen describes death as "one of the most important gifts of all" ("Duskmeadow" 1:15:34), again fitting Derrida's description. This gift is powerful on an abstract level, driving improvement and granting people their deserved "eternal rest" ("Fate-Touched" 59:20), but also manifests its power directly through the game's mechanics. Vax at first acts very defiantly towards the Raven Queen, even when attempting to sacrifice himself in exchange for his sister's life, exclaiming "Take me instead, you raven bitch" ("Tomb" 4:30:36–40). While the Raven Queen does accept this deal (4:31:53–32:00), she does not claim Vax's life but instead his servitude. Vax slowly learns to accept this fate: "You know, I've never put much stock in faith... You weren't my first choice, but I'm over that. And I'm ready" ("Dawn" 2:59:34–3:00:23) and is in turn rewarded with new abilities and powers. While some of these are received by multiclassing into a Paladin ("Umbrasyl" 55:51), a class in *D&D* that is able to channel divine magic, other granted powers exceed class features, such as being resurrected as a temporarily immortal being ("Fate-Touched" 1:00:50–04:37). After fulfilling his purpose in life, however, Vax has to join the Raven Queen as eternal servant, leaving his grieving friends and family behind ("Chapter" 1:27:44–42:39).

Death in *Critical Role: Vox Machina* is thus a powerful gift with unavoidable consequences, for "[w]ith power comes a price" ("Chapter" 1:32:29). While the relationship between Vax and the Raven Queen can be described in Derrida's terms as "dissymmetrical" (33), the goddess of death is not the initiator of the deal and reacts with generosity, even compassion, and a certain flexibility to the mortal's wishes. Learning to accept death and its representative is again a journey, but one accompanied by direct empowerment. Acceptance and empowerment have a circular relationship here: Acceptance provides power, but the received power also facilitates acceptance.

Death as Service: The Many-Faced God in *A Song of Ice and Fire*

The cult of the Many-Faced God is one of several religions practised in the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. According to its priests, however, many, if not all, of the other gods are simply aspects (or faces) of the Many-Faced God, as is suggested by the thirty statues of different gods in his temple, the House of Black and White (Martin, *Crows* 136, 445–47). The claim of universality for this god is justified by the universality of death for humanity: "All mankind belongs to him…else somewhere in the world would be a folk who lived forever" (722).

The Stranger is both a face of this god and one aspect of the one god in the Faith of the Seven (*Crows* 447), showcasing both the flowing transitions between these religions and the elusiveness of death. The Stranger has many characteristics in common with Hades and the Raven Queen, as he has various forms, is an outcast, cannot be fully known, and makes people uncomfortable:

> [T]he Stranger was neither male nor female, yet both, ever the outcast, the wanderer from far places, less and more human, unknown and unknowable […]. It made Catelyn uneasy. She would get scant comfort there. (*Clash* 496).

Since the Stranger is one face of the Many-Faced God, these character traits are also a part of him. The idea that death's true form cannot be known reaches its peak here, as the Many-Faced God neither has a name beyond this descriptive one nor is there even a true form, as all of the faces together are him.

There are, however, core truths taught by his priests, the Faceless Men. Their aphorism-turned-salutation consists of two parts: *valar morghulis*, all men must die, and *valar dohaeris*, all men must serve. Death is inevitable but gentle: "[A]t the end of every road stands Him of Many Faces, waiting. He will be there for you one day, do not fear. You need not rush to his embrace" (*Crows* 138). Death is peaceful and merciful: "His gift to us, an end to want and pain" (449), echoing the Raven Queen's sentiment of death as gift, but evaluating it even more positively. The Faceless Men see themselves as "his servants, sworn to do his will" (445), which translates

to killing others in his name. By spreading his gift, they successfully eliminate Derrida's dissymmetry of the gift-giving and the anxieties coming with it. In order to become perfect servants and extensions of the Many-Faced God's will, the priests, however, have to first kill their individual selves. During her apprenticeship, Arya is repeatedly asked who she is, repeating the answer "no one" (*Dragons* 986) until it becomes either the truth or a very convincing lie (986). The fully initiated priests only use names temporarily, if at all, and are for example referred to as "the kindly man" (*Crows* 444). While Hades's servants, the Furies, are similarly called "Kindly One[s]" (Riordan, *Thief* 19), this is a euphemism spoken in fear. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the expression is taken literally: Kindliness is the face of (a servant of) death confronted without fear (Martin, *Crows* 139), implying that being afraid is not the effect of death being terrible but its cause, reversing Derrida's hierarchy of giver and receiver. The idea of death being elusive and unknowable, on the contrary, is emphasised and extended to death's servants. Not only do the priests not have names, but they are also able to shape-shift using a vast collection of faces as masks (*Dragons* 980). The notion of death as gift is thus, similar to *Critical Role*, connected to (magical) powers.

The religion of the Many-Faced God originated from slaves praying to be released from their suffering (*Crows* 458), but soon was extended to killing third parties as well – for a price:

> The gift was given only to those who yearned for it, in the beginning… but one day, the first of us heard a slave praying not for his own death but for his master's. So fervently did he desire this that he offered all he had, that his prayer might be answered. And it seemed to our first brother that this sacrifice would be pleasing to Him of Many Faces, so that night he granted the prayer. (*Dragons* 698)

The idea of the merciful (or kind) gift, despite all claims of the priests to never kill for their own benefit or profit (974), is thus imbued with a neo-liberal logic, becoming essentially a paid-for murder service. This transactional logic can best be observed in Arya's first encounter with a Faceless Man. After she has saved the life of Jaqen H'ghar and two of his companions (*Clash* 226), Jaqen

contacts Arya to make a deal: "'A man pays his debts. A man owes three.' 'Three?' 'The Red God has his due, sweet girl, and only death may pay for life. This girl took three that were his. This girl must give three in their places" (464–65). Death becomes a commodity that is not gifted but exchanged. The entirely benevolent descriptions of death by the priests can thus also be read as a sales pitch.

Interestingly, Jaqen refers to the "Red God" (*Clash* 465) and not to the Many-Faced one, suggesting that R'hllor, whose priests are able to resurrect (certain) dead people, most prominently Beric Dondarrion (*Storm* 535–36), is one of the many aspects of this deity as well. These deaths and resurrections slowly destroy the recipient's body and memory and with that their identity, only leaving their unfulfilled purpose in life behind (463, 536). Death is thus again neither absolute nor final. All men must die is superseded by the aphorism's other half: All men must serve – until they fulfil their purpose. In the case of the Many-Faced God and his priests, it is not death that is bestowed dissymmetrically, but this painful extension of life. In contrast to their kindly killing and Vax's servitude to the Raven Queen, there are no contracts for this process, making this deity truly inaccessible and unaccountable – even to the reader, since he never appears on the pages of the novels himself.

Conclusion

In all three fantasy series, death is portrayed as the natural and inevitable end for all mortals. Accepting this fact as well as forming a meaningful relationship with the respective personification of death (or his son) takes effort and time. The duality of death is still present: Grief and mourning are made easier but are not entirely eliminated. All three death deities take on various forms, making their true essence a terrible secret in Derrida's sense. While *Vox Machina* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* both incorporate the notion of death as gift, they focus on different aspects of it, namely its function as driver of change and as mercy, respectively. Both ideas are also present in slightly different ways in *Percy Jackson*. The supposed finality of death and impartiality of its embodiment are, however,

limited to varying degrees. In *Percy Jackson*, the afterlife is a physical space that can be visited, and ghosts can be summoned (although this is described as unnatural). In *Vox Machina*, the Raven Queen proves to be somewhat flexible with respect to temporary and final deaths, and in *A Song of Ice and Fire* the Faceless Men can simply be paid in order to end someone's life. Since all three series have been and/or are currently being adapted into big and small screen versions, it will be interesting to see if and how these representations of death also change through this process.

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You Die, Then What? Engaging with Mortality in Collaborative Fantasy Narratives

Pia Holste

Fictional narrative texts frequently explore concepts of death and dying through their protagonists. Fundamentally, readers understand fictional characters as human consciousnesses that experience the events of the narrative, up to and including death. Fantasy narratives offer writers and readers the opportunity to ask: How would this human consciousness react not only to its own death, but to its resurrection? Moreover, tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) based on fantasy conventions place the reader in the role of the protagonist. This paper argues that TTRPGs bring participants even closer to the experience depicted in the narrative, allowing them to reflect on death from a unique perspective.

*Fiktive Erzähltexte erkunden durch ihre Protagonist*innen oft Konzepte von Tod und Sterben. Grundsätzlich verstehen Leser*innen eine fiktionale Figur als ein menschliches Bewusstsein, das die Ereignisse in der Erzählung bis hin zum Tod erlebt. Fantasy-Geschichten bieten Autor*innen und Leser*innen die Möglichkeit, zu fragen: Wie würde dieses menschliche Bewusstsein nicht nur auf den eigenen Tod, sondern auch auf sein Wiederauferstehen reagieren? Auf Fantasy-Konventionen basierende Tabletop-Rollenspiele (TTRPGs) versetzen Leser*innen darüber hinaus selbst in die Rolle der Protagonist*innen. Dieser Beitrag untersucht, wie TTRPGs Teilnehmer*innen näher an die in der Erzählung dargestellte Erfahrung heranführen und es ihnen ermöglichen, den Tod aus einer einzigartigen Perspektive zu betrachten.*

Introduction

Death is one of the most catastrophic events a person can face. When it occurs in a narrative, it irrevocably removes the character from the story. The reader or viewer of that story then finds themself dealing with the emotional impact of 'losing' a character to whom they might have grown attached. Fantasy narratives, however, do not necessarily have to treat death as permanent in the same way that realistic ones do. Readers see fictional characters' deaths

undone in a myriad of ways, ranging from magical efforts to divine interference. As such, stories of this genre expand on the manner in which death can be portrayed and examined in narratives.

There are many subcategories within the realm of fantasy that make use of resurrection in some way or other. Prominent examples can be found in classic works like J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, wherein "various degrees of mortality" (Chandler and Fry 100) are brought up and explored through different characters. The influence of these genre staples can be traced all the way to current forms of fantasy media, including table-top role-playing games (TTRPGs) like *Dungeons & Dragons* (*D&D*). *D&D* first entered the public sphere in the 1970s and 1980s following the success of *Lord of the Rings* (Gifford 107). It enjoyed a tremendous surge in popularity in recent years, due in part to the emergence of so-called actual-play podcasts and web series such as *Critical Role* (Scriven 1), an actual-play *D&D* series that has grown from a hobby production into an immensely popular franchise (Teh). Many of these games remain remarkably faithful to staples of the fantasy genre, utilising fantasy species like elves and dwarves or character classes such as wizards and sorcerers. *D&D* players create their own imaginary character along these lines and embody them in a fictional world, often becoming emotionally attached to them just as much as they do to characters in conventional narratives – if not more (Coven 115). In doing so, the game allows players to become active participants in the creation of a story, whereas they would normally remain relegated to the passive role of 'recipient'. Many players find their characters at risk of dying through the course of their adventures; the spectre of death and mortality thus remains an important part of these narratives.

In this paper, I examine the question of how readers respond to character death in fantastical fiction. When death is no longer the ultimate end, some facets of its meaning for those who suffer through it are irrevocably changed, while others remain the same. In the following, I will first explore how insights from cognitive literary studies enable us to understand how death and resurrection is experienced in fiction. Secondly, I examine the unique qualities

in experiencing death and resurrection offered by TTRPGs, using *D&D* as an example.

Experiencing Death in Fiction

Any depiction of death in narrative aims at the heart of what many people latch onto the closest when reading: characters. As Monika Fludernik claims, narrative is rendered understandable through the reader's ability to recognise a "human agent or experiencer" (*Narratology* 49) in a text. Even in narratives that seem to lack any sort of mediating voice, readers understand the text insofar as it portrays human experience. Likewise, Alan Palmer states that when consuming any fictional narrative, "readers create a continuing consciousness out of the isolated passages of text that relate to a particular character" (15) and follow that individual thread through the story. The story-internal character becomes the "experiencer" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 49) to which the reader can attach themself in order to guide and structure their own reading process.

As such, much of readers' emotional engagement with a story concerns their feelings with regard to its characters. To paraphrase Fludernik once more: we understand characters as people experiencing the narrative, and "people have minds" ("Naturalizing the Unnatural" 17) to which we can attribute parameters of personhood and consciousness. This lies at the core of what many people find enjoyable about reading:

> Whether or not we like to admit it, voyeurism has a lot to do with the pleasures we take in narrative fiction: where else but in a novel can we penetrate into the most guarded and the most fascinating of realms, the inner workings of a foreign consciousness? […] [W]e are […] more likely to be affected by what happens to people we know than by the fate of strangers; and by virtue of the authority of fictional discourse we know certain fictional characters […] better than they know themselves, perhaps even better than we can ever hope to know ourselves. (Ryan 149–50)

Liza Zunshine introduces the similar concept of 'mind-reading'. She describes how the process of reading "engages, teases, and pushes to its tentative limits our mind-reading capacity" (4). Essentially, readers explain fictional behaviour as intentional manifestations of characters' thoughts, beliefs, and desires. She then continues to argue that imagining what a character might be feeling is in itself a pleasurable and enriching activity. In his theory of experientiality, Marco Caracciolo describes that readers may 'enact' fictional consciousnesses while reading; quasi-inhabiting a character's mind to the best of their cognitive and empathic ability while referring to their own knowledge about the world in order to do so (4). Even beyond the cognitive level, he posits that narrative texts invite "the reader to engage with the bodily-perceptual experience of a fictional character" (103) and to focus on how it would feel to be in that situation. Throughout the reading process, the reader thus connects with what they construe to be the minds and consciousnesses around which the narrative revolves.

The theories described above generally claim their applicability only to those narratives that are to some degree realistic insofar as they are "based on cognitive parameters gleaned from real-world experience" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 35). It therefore makes sense to differentiate between more realistic and fantastic narratives in this context. Jan Alber speaks of "unnatural" narratives when referring to texts contradicting "real-world cognitive parameters that are derived from our bodily existence in the world" (26). However, he argues that in these contexts, the fictional consciousness the reader constructs as the central experiencer of the narrative remains intact and 'human' in its cognitive and emotional functioning. According to him, even texts that violate the parameters of real-world existence can nevertheless be incorporated into an experiential reading since

> the unnatural primarily concerns the question of "what it is like" for humans (characters, narrators, or readers) to experience the transcending of physical laws, logical principles, and standard anthropomorphic limitations of knowledge and ability. Even though unnatural scenarios and events contradict real-world parameters, we can still recuperate them in terms of what one might call second-order "experientiality" […]. At the end of the day, all examples of unnaturalness can be read as saying something about us and the world we live in. (36)

What, then, can narratives say about the way in which readers experience death? Stories have always been used as vehicles to discuss complex topics, death and dying chief among them. Going as far back as Aristotle's *Poetics*, the ability of tragedy to elicit strong negative emotions from the reader (catharsis) has been acknowledged as one of the main reasons for engaging with fiction (Ryan 148). Death is usually regarded as one of the most tragic things that can happen to a fictional character — or a person, for that matter; not least due to its profoundly unknowable nature. In talking about death, we encounter the limit of what "the story-telling of others with experience" (Gullette 67) can teach us. When the topic of death is addressed in fiction, however, it becomes imaginatively accessible through the experience of a character. Fiction in any form offers unique opportunities for readers to "process and reflect on their own real-life experiences through the imaginary worlds inside" (Gifford 103). We can observe fictional consciousness in as much detail as we want, making inferences even about what we are not explicitly told, and engage with various questions: what might this dying character be feeling right now? And what does that mean to the reader 'experiencing' this death through them?

It is important to note that the feelings of sorrow and distress that readers may feel when encountering these topics are by no means lesser or 'fake' because they have been elicited by a fictional narrative. Previous studies such as the one conducted by Goldstein indicate that the levels of sadness caused by observing fictional narratives tend to be roughly equal to those caused by nonfictional narratives or recollections of sad personal events. That same study finds, however, that one thing does set narrative apart from actual personal experience: the degree of anxiety felt in response to

it. In other words, while readers do feel sad about a tragic event happening in a narrative, they do not feel *anxious* in response to it, as they do when the same event occurs in real life (Goldstein 236). Zunshine explains this phenomenon in terms of cognitive categorisation, stating that once a story or event is "tagged" as fictional – as opposed to factual – in a reader's mind, it becomes a freely available practice ground to engage one's "Theory of Mind, which is ever hungry for more material to work on" (78), and to attribute mental states to fictional minds as indicated by the narrative. Similarly, a tragic event unfolding within a narrative will impact the reader emotionally; but it will not have an effect on their physical real-world surroundings or their life beyond the reading experience. It remains contained to and by the narrative, restrained behind the cover of a book or the screen of a television – or, in the case of a TTRPG, to the game table.

Stories belonging to the fantasy genre push the limits of 'natural' narratives. With regard to mortality, for instance, they introduce the possibility for death to be only temporary by bringing characters back from the dead through magical means. I propose that this departure from the real does not fundamentally change the way readers engage with the event of character death. Fantasy stories of the kind discussed in this article generally introduce 'impossible' human experiences before a character comes back from the dead. Both readers and, if applicable, characters have already incorporated the storyworld's fantastic rules into their mental concept. I argue that as long as it is not trivialised, death remains a key event in the story that can elicit a range of strong responses – and revival, in any of its forms, becomes another such event. Readers employ a variety of strategies to make sense of the meaning death carries in a story, whether thematically or literally (Caracciolo 5).

Here, the death of Gandalf the Grey in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* can serve as an example for temporary deaths in fantasy stories as it strongly impacts readers and characters alike:

> [Gandalf] staggered and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. "Fly, you fools!" he cried, and was gone. The fires went out, and blank darkness fell. The Company stood rooted with horror staring into the pit. […] They stumbled wildly up the great stairs beyond the door […]. Frodo heard Sam at his side weeping, and then he found that he himself was weeping as he ran. *Doom, doom, doom* the drum-beats rolled behind, mournful now and slow; *doom!* […] Grief at last wholly overcame them, and they wept long: some standing and silent, some cast upon the ground. (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 431–32; original emphasis)

Similar to Frodo and company, the reader might be shocked and surprised at the sudden turn of events; they may feel sadness, maybe even something approaching grief, at the loss of this beloved character. Furthermore, as several of the characters remark (525), the loss of Gandalf significantly reduces their own strength and thus heightens the perceived threat of the forces of evil. As these events unfold, the reader must come to terms with the emotional fallout alongside the characters. His revival later on does not cheapen his previous death, but provides its own form of emotional and narrative impact. Gandalf emerges visibly harrowed by the experience of death (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 654); it has changed him significantly and lastingly. As the omnipotent deity Eru Ilúvatar, creator of all, decides that Gandalf has not yet played his part to its end, he returns him to life with renewed strength. This divine intervention becomes a sign of support from a higher power, giving hope to the Fellowship that their mission is no longer doomed to fail, no matter how bleak things seemed. The following passage exemplifies this change:

> "Do I not say truly, Gandalf," said Aragorn at last, "that you could go whithersoever you wished quicker than I? And this I also say: you are our captain and our banner. The Dark Lord has Nine. But we have One, mightier than they: the White Rider. He has passed through the fire and the abyss, and they shall fear him. We will go where he leads". (653)

Gandalf's characterisation here closely matches that of a "Christ figure", descending into hell before coming back to life (Stucky 4–5). This depiction underlines his death and subsequent resurrection as central turning points in the narrative.

Experiencing *Dungeons & Dragons*

How does this situation change, however, when the reader themself is in charge of constructing Gandalf's interiority? That is the question asked of *Dungeons & Dragons* (*D&D*) players. The narrative of TTRPGs is created in a much more collaborative and interactive process than it is in more traditional literary formats. The external communicative structure of a novel tends to be quite simple: the author produces the text, which is then received by the reader. In games such as D&D, on the other hand, we encounter many more roles at play than just author and reader:

> In such games [TTRPGs], a group of players […] take on the roles of fictional characters in some alternate universe. They generate basic statistics that represent the acquired skills and physical attributes of these characters. One of these players will serve as the referee and design this universe, creating settings to explore and opponents to confront. Players will usually join these characters into a single group to solve these problems, occasionally using dice to decide the outcome of events—whether a character wins or loses a fight, succeeds or fails at a difficult physical task, and so on. […] Players carry over their characters from one playing session to the next, and the next events they encounter may continue the action of earlier sessions or may introduce entirely new events and opponents. (Punday 113–14)

As such, the narrative is constructed through a joint effort between what Punday refers to as the "referee" – usually called the Game Moderator (GM) – and a group of players steering their imagined characters through the world. Discussing the manner in which narratives engage their readers, Ryan refers to "the three basic components of narrative grammar: setting, plot, and characters" (15). In a sense, the GM provides and populates the setting;[1] the players provide the central characters around which the narrative revolves; and through continuous interaction with each other, all partici-

1 This intentionally implies that the GM also provides minor characters to the story-world. However, due to the multifaceted role of the GM, they remain "far more removed from those characters than do the players" (Cover 104). Their possible embodiment of these minor characters will thus not be examined closely in this section.

pants create the plot together. Despite being correctly described as a game in most contexts, there can thus be no doubt that *D&D* is also "fundamentally narrative in nature" (Punday 114). The story becomes simultaneously a top-down construction to the extent that the GM, the source material, and the rules provide a basis for the storyworld, *and* a bottom-up process via the players and their characters determining how the story will proceed. In this collaborative construct, everyone involved is both empowered by and limited to their role of co-author. Engaging in a game of *D&D* as a player is just as much an act of creation as it is one of reception.

This participatory aspect puts players in a very different position to that of a reader engaging with a non-interactive narrative. Where the reader is usually forced to observe from the distance, in TTRPGs, the players become a vital part of the text-creating process. Their characters are at the centre of the narrative that develops through the course of the game; they effectively become the hero of their own fantasy story, and the decisions they make while role-playing their characters steer the course of the plot in a very real sense. In light of this, players take great pains to come up with rounded, multifaceted, and individualised characters "whose actions are psychologically realistic" (Punday 114) and authentically representative of the complexities of their personhood. The game instructions specifically emphasise that players are encouraged to attempt to embody their character as follows:

> Roleplaying is, literally, the act of playing out a role. In this case, it's *you* as a player determining how your character thinks, acts, and talks. Roleplaying is a part of every aspect of the game […]. When you use active roleplaying, you speak with your character's voice, like an actor taking on a role. You might even echo your character's movements and body language. (Crawford et al. 185–86; original emphasis)

Players who follow this advice mentally put themselves in the shoes of their character and "self-narrate the experiences, decisions, and feelings of their persona-character" (Gifford 105). In order to better understand and portray its inner workings, they thus enter the minds of their characters to get a sense of who they are. Instead of using third-person narration, players may speak about their char-

acter's actions as if they themselves were performing them: *I* am going to go over there, *I* will try to hit the monster with *my* weapon (Crawford et al. 5). Rather than looking for a human experiencer who they can follow through the narrative, *D&D* players are in the privileged position of being able to become their own experiencer. The emotional distance that usually exists between a reader and the characters in more traditional narratives is thus reduced to a minimum as the focalisation of the narrative becomes multifactorial, being accessed through a variety of different viewpoints.

Through all of these mechanisms – the linguistic connection between player and character, the interactive nature of text creation, and the focus on player agency – *D&D* involves the player intimately with the text itself in ways non-interactive narratives usually cannot. That is not to say that the immersion is necessarily absolute; it is rare that a person feels so utterly immersed in the story that they literally forget they are engaging with fiction, a phenomenon that Ryan calls "Alternate World Syndrome" (10). In fact, as I argue, it is in many ways vital that the protective layer of fictionality be maintained in these settings. It should also be stated unequivocally that a player and their character are by no means the same, and should not be regarded as such. There is, however, an undeniable exchange that occurs between the "related and contiguous categories of the self" (Gifford 108) that a player exhibits when channelling their character in the context of *D&D*. The act of playing a character can almost be seen as a direct manifestation of Caracciolo's experientiality:

> [T]here is a two-way movement between the background and narrative: like experiential machines, stories need experiential input, but also produce some output, since they can bring about a restructuring of each reader's experiential background by generating new "story-driven" experiences. (5)

In other words, players use their past experiences of the real world in order to extrapolate what their character might feel. It is, to paraphrase Zunshine, a mind-reading – and mind-constructing – exercise in which the player is both led through the narrative and leads

it themself via their character, quasi-experiencing the events of the story as them.

Death in *Dungeons & Dragons*

How does this manner of cognitive involvement impact the way in which participants react to and engage with character death? The communicative situation within *D&D* provides players with a unique opportunity to examine what death means to them individually and how it impacts those around them. This applies in both the emotional and the thematic sense, as players oscillate between the intra- and extradiegetic dimensions of the narrative.

To begin with, the player themself is directly impacted by the event on an extradiegetic level. Since the player's participation is made possible through their character, the character's death means that the player is excluded from the narrative from this point forth – at least temporarily. The player thus finds themself in the interesting position of being able to directly observe how their choices influence the way the narrative unfolds without them. Having taken such an active role in steering their character, there is an opportunity to ask questions: should I have done something differently? *Would* I, given the chance? Additionally, the impact of that death becomes much more emotionally immediate. Through the course of the game, the player has invested time, thought, and energy into imagining their character as intricately as they would any human person, and then done their best to inhabit that imagined mind as if they were one and the same. They feel sadness, they feel grief, the same way that a person might feel these emotions when someone they know dies in real life (Sidhu and Carter 1057).

On the story-internal level, where the player mainly exists and acts as their character, they are now, suddenly, dead. However, the player is still able to think as their character and thus finds themself grappling with existential questions most people do not get to see answered in their lifetime: how do those around me react to my death? Am I happy with how I am remembered? Do I have regrets about the life I have lived? Having inhabited their mind to such an

extent, it is possible for the player to work through these questions *as* the character, even after their death; it is a unique opportunity for post-mortem introspection. As such, the event of death becomes at least partially something that happens *to the player* as much as it does to their character (Sidhu and Carter 1053–54).

One popular example illustrating how *D&D* expands on the ways in which people can engage with and reflect on intense emotional experiences through narrative is the web series *Critical Role*, which was already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. By the time one campaign comes to an end and a group of characters is retired, "the cast has lived in their characters' head-spaces for 'hundreds and hundreds of hours'" (Teh), and many of the characters have come into contact with death in one way or another. Several of the players involved in the show have spoken about the ways in which their characters have enabled them to explore aspects of themselves and their real-life experience, stating, for instance, that a character they played in the game "was a vehicle for [them] to sort of ask questions and understand human beings in a way that [they] needed help with, at the time".

> "When I look back at the stories we created around the table, I don't think, 'Yeah, that's where we rolled dice, and I came up with a funny little speech, and we performed well, and it was a nice show,'" [Liam O'Brien] said. "No — *I saw that happen. I thought I was going to lose my sister.* I fell in love. I found redemption. I risked everything, and gained the world. All the moments together with my best friends are just burned into my brain, and I will remember memories with them as much as I remember holding my children for the first time, and spending time with my father in his later years"'. (my emphasis)

Although the acting and production value seen on *Critical Role* has in many ways gone beyond what one would consider the typical player's home game, it nevertheless exemplifies what is possible when participants are able to lean in to the physically and emotionally embodied aspect of playing a character. In a very literal sense, they can find themselves able to experience a range of emotions elicited by events they would and could never witness in real life – and take introspective lessons from it just the same.

The sheer magnitude of both death and, when it occurs, resurrection, is reflected in the rules of *D&D*, which encourage taking death seriously despite the possibility of revival. A common method for resurrecting dead characters is by use of spells such as 'Resurrection', 'Raise Dead', and 'Reincarnate'. These spells all carry high material costs, and several of them incur in-game consequences:

> Coming back from the dead is an ordeal. The target takes a -4 penalty to all attack rolls, saving throws, and ability checks. Every time the target finishes a long rest, the penalty is reduced by 1 until it disappears. (Crawford et al. 270)

When these technical repercussions are incorporated into the narrative, their gravity reflects the intensity of the experience for both the player and their character. It cannot simply be shrugged off as a minor inconvenience, but is shown through the mechanics of the game to have a profound impact for which the narrative must account.

Consequently, the possible emotional intensity of a *D&D* game cannot be overstated. Moments of death and resurrection in *D&D* become "imbued with meaning that exists within, and can transcend beyond, game boundaries" (Sidhu and Carter 1056). Behind that aforementioned protective layer of fictionality, it is possible to "experience emotions without need for self protection" (Goldstein 233). After all, the game will eventually end, and the player will be able to leave these feelings behind if they want to; or they might choose to contemplate the matter further.

Conclusion

Fiction enables writers and readers alike to engage with issues that cannot be easily resolved, giving room to a multitude of possible paths forward. Fantasy narratives go even further in that they imagine a world beyond the possible range of human experience. In TTRPGs, this process is expanded upon as players are asked to

imagine *themselves* as the individuals experiencing the events of a story, however impossible these might be.

With the introduction of themes such as life, death, and mortality, TTRPGs like *D&D* push players to imagine what it might be like for the game's events to really happen to them – through the self they have chosen to embody for the occasion of one particular game. Unlike in non-interactive narratives, in which the reader must follow the story as intended by the author, here the player gets to decide what aspect of death they want to examine. It is an opportunity to ask deeply personal questions and get tentative answers. Individual experience and what facets of meaning one draws from it becomes central, determining how the events of death and possibly resurrection will impact both the narrative and the player as a person.

This type of narrative offers a unique opportunity to deeply examine individual aspects of how one thinks about and conceptualises death. Just like in non-interactive narratives, certain insights about human existence "come not despite the nearness of death, but because of it" (Gullette 81) – and a game of *D&D* might bring a person as close to that moment as safely possible.

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Death as a Character and Its Philosophical Depiction in Children's Books

Artemis Papailia

The analysis of the various depictions of death and its changing function in children's literature is of both social and literary interest. The aim of this paper is to explore and demonstrate how children's picturebooks legitimize and encourage the philosophical depiction of the concept of death and, at the same time, the philosophical thinking of children by allowing them to engage with existential questions in a developmentally appropriate manner. Death as a character is represented as global and irreversible through the interplay between text and imagery. The studied picturebooks 'trigger' the philosophical investigation of the concept of death and, through philosophical 'connections', encourage children to bestow meaning on their world, each in its own way.

Die Analyse der verschiedenen Darstellungsweisen des Todes und seiner sich wandelnden Funktion in der Kinderliteratur ist sowohl von sozialem als auch literarischem Interesse. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, zu zeigen, wie Bilderbücher für Kinder die philosophische Darstellung des Todeskonzepts legitimieren und fördern und gleichzeitig das philosophische Denken von Kindern anregen, indem sie es Kindern erlauben, sich auf eine altersangemessene Art und Weise mit existenziellen Fragen zu beschäftigen. Der Tod als Figur wird grundlegend durch das Zusammenspiel von Text und Bild als global und unumkehrbar dargestellt. Schließlich regen die untersuchten Bilderbücher, jedes auf seine eigene Weise, die philosophische Untersuchung des Todeskonzepts an und ermutigen Kinder, durch philosophische 'Verbindungen' ihrer Welt Bedeutung zu verleihen.

Introduction

Death, a universal constant, remains one of humanity's most profound enigmas, sparking diverse reactions ranging from reverence to fear. Historically intertwined with the fabric of universal tales and myths, death's portrayal in literature serves as a mirror, reflecting society's evolving attitudes and beliefs about this inevitable fate.

Within the realm of children's literature, this reflection takes on an added layer of complexity. Young minds, inherently curious yet still developing their cognitive frameworks, encounter the concept of death with a blend of innocence and wonder (Dolto 40; Nagy 3–27). While adults may shroud death in layers of taboo, avoidance, or mysticism, children's literature seeks to offer a more candid, albeit tailored exploration of this theme. This paper specifically focuses on the examination of death within three European children's picturebooks, selected for their impact on the philosophical engagement of young readers with the concept of mortality. Through a detailed analysis of these narratives, set against the backdrop of the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century, this study aims to unravel how death, transcending its traditional portrayal as an event or an end, emerges as a character with whom one can interact, whom one can question and understand. By exploring the ways in which these books frame death – philosophically and visually – this research endeavors to illustrate how children's literature in Europe has served as a medium for encouraging children to ponder, reflect, and ultimately derive meaning through the intriguing interplay between life and death.

Evolution of the Portrayal of Death in Children's Literature

Historical children's tales frequently utilized death as a lesson. Aesop's fables, for instance, employed animals to convey moral lessons, occasionally highlighting the unpredictability and inevitability of death. For example, in "The Ant and the Grasshopper", the Grasshopper spends the entire summer singing and enjoying the weather, neglecting to prepare for the winter. In contrast, the Ant works diligently to store food for the colder months. When winter arrives, the Grasshopper finds itself starving and begs the Ant for food. The Ant, reflecting on the Grasshopper's earlier choices, declines to assist, leading to the Grasshopper's demise from starvation.

As societies evolved, particularly within the context of the Christianization of Europe, children's tales began to reflect the influence of Christian doctrines, portraying death not merely as an end but as a passage to the afterlife. Through these narratives, children were introduced to the concept of an afterlife where moral conduct in life influences one's fate beyond death, aligning with the Christian emphasis on virtues and moral rectitude as pathways to salvation (Ariès 30).

In the literature for children during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a notable trend emerged: the realistic portrayal of violence and death (Kimmel 265–68; Reynolds and Yates 153–54). While the Christian idea of salvation still permeated societal beliefs, the literature of the time began to address the harsh realities faced by children. This shift can be seen as part of a broader transformation in societal attitudes toward death. The high child mortality rates, combined with frequent incidents of child abandonment and the public executions of criminals – events that were often witnessed even by young children – painted a grim backdrop against which these stories were set (Butler). This period marked a continuation of the centuries-old struggle with child mortality, providing a somber context for children's literature.

Yet, within this setting, another trend developed: literature began to serve as a tool for disciplining the child, intertwining moral lessons with harsh consequences for misbehavior. An especially illustrative example of this trend can be found in *Der Struwwelpeter* (1845) by Heinrich Hoffmann. Intended as a series of moral lessons for children, the stories feature a variety of gruesome fates for children who misbehave. From the boy who refuses to stop sucking his thumb and then has it cut off by a tailor to the girl who plays with matches and ends up burning to death, the lessons are clear and uncompromising. These stories, harrowing to the contemporary reader, served as cautionary tales, aimed at instilling discipline and moral values, a reflection of what Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* as the increasing tendency to discipline and control bodies, including the youngest members of society. As Strong suggests (qtd. in Plotz 2), the collapse of innocence, especially when represented by a child, is the true theme

of the Victorian era, illustrating a societal shift towards using literature to instill discipline and moral values amidst the harsh realities of the time.

Other tales of the era also encapsulate this trend (Tatar 49). For example, *The Juniper Tree* (1812) by the Brothers Grimm presents a grim tale where a wicked stepmother kills her stepson and serves him as a meal to his father. Also, in *The Red Shoes* (1845) by Hans Christian Andersen, a young girl is forced to dance non-stop in her cursed red shoes until she begs an executioner to cut off her feet. Such fairy tales, jarring as they might seem now, used fantastic elements to teach lessons about the very real dangers and consequences of stepping out of line in a world that was often harsh and unforgiving.

Later, children's literature began to liberate itself from its overly utilitarian and moralistic direction, placing more emphasis on children's entertainment, humor, and sensitizing them to social issues. From the early twentieth century up to the 1970s, it can be observed that taboo subjects started to be removed from children's literature. This change reflects a broader societal shift, where the emphasis was on preserving the innocence and joy of childhood, shielding children from distress and trauma (Petkou 2). As a result, many authors of the era believed in protecting young readers from life's harsh realities.[1] Consequently, themes such as death were often depicted as taboo topics for a child audience.

In the twenty-first century, the landscape of children's literature has transformed significantly, and the theme of death is not a taboo anymore (Gibson and Zaidman 232). Every child, now more than ever, is recognized for their inherent right to intellectual freedom, personal growth, and an authentic understanding of the world. This acknowledgment aligns with the principles set forth by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

1 Reflecting on the trend of avoiding taboo topics such as death in children's literature, it strikes me as a response intertwined with the bleak circumstances of two world wars. These periods of conflict introduced unparalleled levels of grief and loss, also touching the lives of children. Thus, the efforts of the era's authors to shield their young readers resonate with me as an attempt to safeguard childhood innocence, aiming to cast a ray of hope and maintain a semblance of normalcy in a world overshadowed by turmoil.

(2019), which emphasizes the importance of respecting children's rights to access information, to freedom of thought, and to seek, receive, and impart ideas of all kinds. As we navigate this era, it is imperative to equip the younger generation with the tools to comprehend and accept loss and death as natural facets of existence.

Literature, Philosophy, and Childhood: Delving into the Inevitability of Mortality

The interplay between literature and philosophy with children has been a long-standing conversation (Theodoropoulou, *Searching Philosophy* 12–41). In an article entitled "Do children think philosophically?" Richard Kitchener, a proponent of the Piagetian theory, has made the claim that children cannot do "real" philosophy (426–27). On the other hand, Go, an opponent of the above view, raises two main issues: "The real possibility and right of philosophy to be addressed and produced by children, centered on the nature of itself and the danger of its alteration", and "Are children capable of philosophical thought and what benefits will they derive from the acquisition of it?" (119–20).

The first issue that inevitably arises is perhaps the contentious question of "What kinds of concerns are included under the term philosophy?" (Theodoropoulou, *Philosophy for Children* 11–46). Briefly, I argue that philosophy, above all, is critical discourse that excels with inherently philosophical tools. It is, in other words, an inquiry that is itself philosophical. However, following this clarification, the question arises: "What do we mean when we talk about philosophy with/for children?" (Theodoropoulou, *Philosophy for Children* 11–46). Its practice, through teaching, means that our interest is focused on the child itself, aiming for them to gain awareness of themselves and the world. This activity aims to activate children and cultivate their capacity for dialogue, reflective inquiry, and critical thinking.

The American philosopher and educator Matthew Lipman conducted extensive research into the philosophical capacities of children (*Philosophy for Children* 17–33). He argues that children are not

just capable of understanding philosophical concepts, but that they can deeply benefit from such engagements (Lipman and Sharp 53). Children, with their insatiable curiosity and burgeoning cognition, are innate philosophers. Alison Gopnik, a renowned psychologist and author, explores this concept in her work, *The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life*, in which she argues that young children's minds offer profound insights into the most fundamental aspects of human nature. Gopnik presents evidence that children's early experiences and thought processes are not just simplistic or immature versions of adult cognition, but instead represent a uniquely flexible and imaginative way of engaging with the world (5). She suggests that by studying how children think, feel, and explore we can learn much about the essential qualities of love, truth, and the meaning of life, shedding light on how human cognition develops and functions at its most elemental level (5). Lipman's initiatives in philosophy for children demonstrate that philosophical discourse can enhance critical thinking, moral reasoning, and even democratic sensibilities in young minds (*Thinking in Education* 28–56). His works, such as *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (1974), introduce children to complex philosophical ideas through relatable narratives, opening paths to logic, ethics, and even metaphysics for them.

Children's inquiries, particularly those that begin with "why", offer them the possibility of unfolding questions with philosophical aspects. According to Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, philosophical questions formulated by children belong to the field of: a) metaphysics ("what is it? life, death, time, number, intellect"), b) logic, related to argumentation ("what follows from this?"), and c) of ethics ("what should/ should not be right?") (33–40). We are therefore talking about a pre-philosophical activation of human thought, signified by the innate curiosity that leads children to ask questions resembling the onset of philosophical thinking. These questions emerge from what we describe as 'philosophical receptors', the mental faculties or inclinations that spur children to question, ponder, and seek a deeper understanding of their surroundings. Encouraging the activation of these receptors entails creating an environment that values inquisitiveness and the pur-

suit of insight. It involves guiding children not just to accumulate facts, but to weave these facts into a meaningful narrative about the world and their place within it. Research conducted by Lipman showed that children's ability to "philosophize" is achieved at the age of 10–11 years and especially prominent at the age of 11–13 years, an age range that corresponds to Jean Piaget's "stage of formal logical operations" or "the period of abstract thinking" around 11–15 years of age (qtd. in Papailia, *Issue of Death* 113).

Introducing children to philosophical concepts, especially one as inevitable as death, requires a delicate touch, and literature can become the necessary instrument to do this (Kohan 2–8). Karin Murris, in her doctoral dissertation in 1997 inspired by the P4C project by Lipman, proposed picturebooks as mediums for philosophical discussion with children. After the initial conception of the idea, Karrin Murris wrote the book *Picturebook, Pedagogy and Philosophy* (2012) with Joanna Haynes, which also makes use of picturebooks to explain and illustrate complex and abstract ideas, concepts, and philosophical considerations. Picturebooks represent a multimodal genre that places equal value on text and illustration, where images and words collaborate in the storytelling process (Nikolajeva and Scott). Images expand the text, filling in the gaps left by words and adding layers of meaning and emotion that text alone cannot convey. Indeed, the 'gaps' between words and images and the ambiguity of meaning create a space in which readers bring their own experiences and knowledge to the reading process (Ekonomidou 239; Papailia, *Wordless Books* 45–47). In these gaps, in other words, philosophical thinking can thrive.

As the twenty-first century progresses, with its rapid technological advancements and shifting societal norms, it becomes even more crucial for children to be grounded in philosophical thinking. The challenges and dilemmas of today's world require a generation that can think critically, reason ethically, and navigate the complexities of human existence with empathy and understanding. And while death might be a daunting theme to introduce to young minds, it is an essential part of the human experience, one that literature and philosophy, in tandem, can help them understand and accept.

A Philosophical Approach to Picturebooks

The chosen methodology for this research paper is content analysis in conjunction with a philosophical approach to literature, as proposed by Helena Theodoropoulou (*Philosophical Findings* 3–5). The aim is to highlight the intersections and interplays between literature and philosophy, especially when seeking philosophical themes within literary works.

A key aspect in analyzing the philosophical depth of a text relates to its intrinsic 'density' and 'frequency' of philosophical content. It is also tied to a reader's ability to bring to light such an analysis and to understand such philosophical intricacies (Theodoropoulou, *Philosophical Findings* 4). The goal in employing quasi-philosophical readings is to illuminate the philosophical imprint of the concept of death in picturebooks for children. A philosophical reading of a picturebook is not merely about finding literal meanings in the images. Instead, it requires an understanding that images metaphorically express ideas, dispositions, abstract concepts, and qualities which cannot be directly depicted. Building on the close relationship between literature and philosophy, fostering analytical pathways both within and outside the texts helps excavate their potential philosophical undertones. The rationale behind choosing a philosophical approach to picturebooks lies in its intriguing proposal: to view picturebooks as alternative philosophical texts (Murris 277). I am interested in how each work, through its unique structure and disposition, fosters philosophical frameworks, concepts, issues, and reasoning. This methodology enables an analysis of the connotations of portraying death as a living entity within the narratives of select children's books.

This study focuses on high-quality picturebooks published in Europe around the turn of the millennium (1997–2007). In the careful selection of books for this study, a deliberate focus was placed on early readers as the primary audience, as early childhood represents a crucial period for gently and accessibly introducing complex themes. Also, a pivotal selection factor was the personification of death, aiming to present this abstract concept as a character with whom children can interact, empathize, and whom they

can understand, making death more accessible and less intimidating. The selected books are: *Bonjour Madame la Mort* (1997) by Pascal Teulade and illustrated by Jean Charles Sarrazin, *La visite de petite mort* (2004) by Kitty Crowther, and *Duck, Death and the Tulip* (2007) by Wolf Erlbruch. Each of these books contributes to the exploration of death as a personified entity, both in narrative content and illustrative depiction, thus forming a cohesive collection that provides a comprehensive perspective on the subject.

The primary objective of this analysis revolves around the examination of how death is characterized and depicted. The analysis probes deeply into both the textual narrative and the accompanying illustrations (Nikolajeva and Scott 225–39). Central to this analysis are three key dimensions. Firstly, the visual representation of death is a pivotal point, encompassing aspects such as its appearance, attire, and expressions. Secondly, the dialogues and interactions that revolve around or involve the character of death are assessed to understand the narrative depth. Thirdly, understanding the emotional undertones associated with death's portrayal, such as feelings of fear, acceptance, or even curiosity, is paramount. In tandem with these analytical points, the study explores the philosophical depths these portrayals touch upon, especially in the context of engaging young readers. By diving into these narratives, the overarching aim is to discern how such books might serve as potent tools for philosophical inquiry with children.

Personifications of Death in Picturebooks

In the book *Bonjour Madame la Mort*, as the narrative unfolds, an elderly woman with diminished sense of hearing is greeted by an unexpected visitor, Madame la Mort. This chance encounter evolves into an endearing bond, ultimately culminating in a touching waltz and the woman's serene passing. Visually, Madame la Mort is represented as a skeletal entity, cloaked in black with her iconic scythe, appearing amidst the striking backdrop of lightning, a portrayal echoing the familiar depictions of death from the 19th century, especially those by French painter and illustrator Gustave Doré

(Fig. 1). By maintaining this traditional attire, the illustrator bridges past and present, suggesting that while our interpretations of death may evolve, certain symbols remain potent and universally recognizable. This continuity allows for a dialogue between the old and the new, inviting readers to reflect on the enduring nature of these symbols across generations. But the tale surprises us with its adaptability: Madame la Mort transitions from her symbolic cloak and scythe, adopting a more everyday apparel when living with the elderly woman, such as jeans or a nightgown, challenging and reshaping traditional death archetypes. This shift reimagines death with a feminine touch, accessorized and elegantly dressed, while carefully sidestepping explicit gender categorization.[2]

Fig. 1: Gustave Doré's illustration for Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" (cropped)

In the beginning of the story, Madame la Mort's demeanor is resolute and commanding, her voice echoing the haunting proclamation "Allez! Il faut mourir!" ("Come on! You must die!", Teulade & Sarrazin 6). Her presence is designed to instill fear and descriptions such as "la main *glacée"* ("cold hands", 9) underline her separation from the living. Yet, the elderly woman's affectionate hospitality, coupled with her lack of recognition, prompts a transformative journey for this harbinger of the end. Engaging with life's simplicities, Madame la Mort learns laughter, play, and the joys of being, gradually becoming more humane in the process.

By the conclusion of the book, it becomes evident that Madame la Mort does not take lives out of malice, but rather because it is an inherent part of life's cyclical nature, as a lot of people are waiting

2 Such a representation is no isolated incident. Anne Quesemand's *La Mort-maraine* also contains a feminine representation of death in quotidian clothing.

for her to come (Teulade & Sarrazin 19). Thus, the elderly woman gracefully departs, her spirit fading like the final flicker of a candle. Life and death are intrinsically intertwined. As this story shows, it is life that determines when one's journey concludes, and death merely serves as the gentle guide on this inevitable transition.

Bonjour Madame la Mort is an existential exploration which probes the essence of life and its relationship with the inescapable shadow of death. By anthropomorphizing Madame la Mort, the tale nudges children to consider that even abstract concepts such as death can have desires for understanding, purpose, and companionship. Such a representation seems to echo the existential musings of thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre who argues that individuals must navigate their existence to define their essence (90), which mirrors Madame la Mort's quest for purpose, and Albert Camús' exploration of the absurd, highlighting the struggle for meaning in a universe that remains silent to our queries (7), which is reflected in the story's contemplation of death as an inevitable yet profoundly significant part of life. Furthermore, Friedrich Nietzsche's concepts of 'being' and 'becoming' is vividly embodied in the transformation of Madame la Mort from an emotionless specter to a character filled with feelings and curiosity. This evolution reflects Nietzsche's philosophical musings on the journey of 'becoming who you are' and can inspire children to reflect on their personal paths of discovery and acceptance (Nietzsche 175–78). The narrative's exploration of life's cyclical nature also offers an accessible gateway for children into the foundational tenets of Eastern philosophies, such as Buddhism and Taoism. By illustrating the serene passing of the old woman, the story introduces children to the continuous cycle of existence: from birth to life, death, and perhaps, rebirth (Tzu 76). The portrayal of rebirth, particularly through the imagery of a tomb in the last scene, serves as a metaphor within the Christian tradition, symbolizing the end of physical life but also the promise of eternal life through the potential of resurrection.

Ultimately, *Bonjour Madame la Mort* serves as a powerful example of how children's literature can be both a source of joy and a foundational philosophical tool. Through the presentation of the subject of death, several questions arise, such as: Should we ac-

cept death or feel rage against it? Do we want to know when we will die? Why yes or why not? Why do you think the old lady and death became friends? What is the significance of the candle at the end of the book?. The text and the illustrations offer further reflection on the good or bad nature of death and its acceptance or not. For example, death, when living with the old lady, is fully humanized, dressed in human clothes, cooking, sitting by the fireplace, and even taking pictures. This humanization symbolizes the old lady's acceptance of death's presence and role in life. She comes to terms with death's inevitability, accepting it both literally, as a character she interacts with daily, and figuratively, as a natural part of existence.

In *La Visite de Petite Mort* by Kitty Crowther, death is a little melancholic child, lonely and misunderstood. From the very outset, the title's use of the diminutive *petite* ("very small") sets the tone for a portrayal of death that is devoid of the formidable presence often attributed to it. The emphasis on *petite* evokes feelings of innocence and vulnerability, setting the stage for the character's later introduction as a child. The characterization of Petite Mort is a whimsical reimagining; it serves as a metaphorical tool to address the young readers. By adopting a childlike representation, Crowther simplifies the complex theme of death, making it more accessible to a younger audience. The shift from a traditionally male, aggressive portrayal of death to a softer, female one further helps in reducing the anxiety associated with the concept.

Crowther's exploration of societal beliefs and fears is evident in the interaction between Petite Mort and her first acquaintance in the book, an old man (8–14). The old man's fear, stemming from deep-rooted cultural beliefs about death and hell, is palpable: he is crying and he is feeling cold (10). His negative reaction to the warmth offered by Petite Mort underscores the ingrained fear and the misconceptions about death as an entry into a torturous afterlife.

Yet, it is the encounter of Petite Mort with Elsewise that becomes the pivotal moment in the narrative. Unlike the fearful old man, Elsewise, a little girl who is very ill, embraces death, signaling an acceptance and understanding that many adults lack. Her excla-

mation: "Enfin, vous été là!" ("You're finally here!", Crowther 15) resonates with relief, suggesting that for her, death is not an end but a release from pain. Her name, when deconstructed, gives us insights into her character. As someone with a different wisdom or an unconventional perspective, Elsewise represents an alternative viewpoint on death. Rather than fearing it, she embraces it, seeing it as a gateway to relief and transformation.

Crowther's portrayal of the journey with Petite Mort is deeply poetic. Drawing from Greek mythology, the journey to the realm of death recalls the familiar tales of souls crossing the Acheron, where according to mythology was the entrance to Hades, the Underworld. By setting Elsewise's journey in a boat that transcends to the Underworld, a setting echoing this myth, Crowther bridges the gap between ancient legends and contemporary narratives, creating a continuity of themes and emotions that resonate across time. The moments Elsewise and Petite Mort share by the lake, and the joyous play and laughter in Petite Mort's kingdom, all symbolize a transition that is not rooted in fear, but in acceptance and understanding. Petite Mort is an allegorical figure that is depicted with childlike innocence and vulnerability. Elsewise, with her vivacious spirit, playfulness, and laughter, humanizes death and reminds it of its own childlike essence. Petite Mort's statement "*Elle ne s'est jamais sentie aussi vivante*" ("She had never felt so alive", Crowther 22) stands as a testament to this transformative interaction. It is not just about death bringing an end to life, but about how life and death are interconnected and mutually influential.

Crowther also uses animals as symbolism, placing owls and snakes in her illustrations. These animals have contrasting yet complementary relationships in different cultures, religions, myths, and legends around the world. The owl is seen as a symbol of wisdom in many Western cultures, particularly in Ancient Greece, but also as a harbinger of death in some Native American tribes, in many parts of Africa, and in various Asian cultures (Eason 71). The owl is often shown present next to Petite Mort: an owl is seen far away from the bed of the old man and another one lying in Elsewise's bed the first time she meets her friend (Crowther 8; 15). Regarding the illustration of snakes, those have long been associated with

both good and evil, representing life and death, creation and destruction. They are seen as guardians of the underworld particularly in Ancienct Egypt, as well as representing the forces of rebirth and fertility, for example in Hinduism (Eason 19–25). Thus, the use of these symbols highlights her kingdom as a place of ending, but also as a place of beginning, a place that raises awareness of the inevitable events of the life and death cycle.

In her work, Crowther thus brings philosophy down to a level where children, with their inherent curiosity and wonder, can grasp and ponder over a concept as abstract as death. The decision to personify death as a little childlike figure serves multiple purposes. Beyond making the topic more approachable, it nudges young readers to recognize and relate to the universal experiences of loneliness, misunderstanding, and longing for acceptance – themes that Petite Mort embodies. The relationship that Elsewise develops with Petite Mort allows the emergence of themes related to the fear and acceptance of death. In the book under consideration, the child-reader can move from a stage of simple interpretation to the level of reflection through the posing of relevant questions, such as: What happens when we die? What takes place afterwards? Where do we think we go after we die? Can we go anywhere? The philosophical core of the story is about understanding life, existence, death, and the myriad of emotions that come with it. By framing these in the context of a child's experiences, Crowther ensures that her young readers do not feel overwhelmed. Instead, they are gently guided into the realm of introspection and contemplation. It is an invitation to ponder over life's cyclical nature, to understand that endings are often new beginnings, and to see that there is beauty and wonder even in topics that adults might shy away from discussing with children.

This gentle approach to weighty topics is echoed in the minimalist illustrations and delicate prose of Erlbruch's *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, which delves into an exploration of mortality, acceptance, and the essence of existence. By providing Death with feelings, thoughts, and the ability to engage in conversation, Erlbruch demystifies death. Moreover, by illustrating her in soft shades and by

clothing the skeletal figure with a dress, Death is again further portrayed as a feminine figure.

In the narrative, a Duck crosses paths with Death and initiates a profound exchange with her. The meeting of Duck with Death acts as an allegory for the human experience. The initial fear and mistrust Duck feels upon realizing Death's presence is emblematic of our own innate fear of the unknown, especially when it comes to the end of life. However, as the story progresses, the growing bond between Duck and Death highlights a profound truth: understanding and accepting death can enrich our appreciation of life.

For children, the narrative offers an invaluable lesson about the transient nature of existence. The changing seasons symbolize the phases of life and this revelation is particularly significant for young minds as it nudges them towards grasping the idea of impermanence and the cyclical nature of life and death. The interaction between Duck and Death about the afterlife delves into humanity's perennial quest for understanding what lies beyond. By not providing a definitive answer, Erlbruch encourages young readers to ponder, question, and form their own beliefs. This open-ended approach aligns with the philosophical tenet of promoting inquiry over dogma. Furthermore, the heartwarming and, at times, humorous exchanges between Duck and Death serve a dual purpose. Examples such as "'What shall we do today?' Death asked. 'Well, let's not go back to the pond. Let's do something really exciting.' Death was relieved. 'Shall we climb a tree?' he teased" (Erlbruch 19) or "'Are you cold?' Duck asked. 'Shall I warm you a little?' Nobody had offered to do that for Death" (14) lighten the weight of the subject matter, ensuring young readers remain engaged, while also emphasizing that discussions about death need not be somber or terrifying.

Towards the end, when Duck's life culminates with the onset of winter, the serene depiction of Death carrying her to the river becomes a beautiful metaphor for the cycle of life and death. The act of releasing Duck into the river and the accompanying realization: "*But that's life*" (Erlbruch 31; original emphasis), encapsulates the essence of acceptance and the natural order of things.

Conclusions

In analyzing children's literature that explores the theme of death, the three picturebooks under examination provide interesting insights into how death is portrayed and understood in narratives aimed at young audiences. Similarities across the three picturebooks include the humanization of death, making it a relatable and less intimidating figure for child-readers. Each book incorporates death into daily life, presenting it as a continuous presence that interacts with the living. However, the differences between the books are as revealing as their similarities. In *Bonjour Madame la Mort*, death initially appears in a traditional, fearsome guise, but transforms into a more benign, even comforting presence as the story progresses. This portrayal contrasts sharply with *La Visite de Petite Mort*, where death is introduced immediately as a vulnerable, child-like figure, emphasizing innocence and eliciting empathy from the outset. *Duck, Death and the Tulip* presents yet another approach by depicting death as a gentle, almost humorous companion from the beginning, focusing on building a friendship that teaches about the transient nature of life through calm and reflective dialogue. The way death interacts with other characters also varies significantly. In *Bonjour Madame la Mort*, the narrative focuses on death's transformation through its interaction with an elderly woman, highlighting a journey from an emblem of fear to a symbol of peace. *La Visite de Petite Mort* explores societal fears and misconceptions through death's encounters, featuring a transformative encounter with a sick child who reacts differently to its presence. Meanwhile, in *Duck, Death and the Tulip*, the interaction between Duck and Death is used to explore philosophical questions about life and the afterlife in a gentle, accessible manner. Visually, each book also takes a distinct path. *Bonjour Madame la Mort* uses stark, dramatic imagery that gradually softens, reflecting the narrative's shift in tone. *La Visite de Petite Mort* employs simple, minimalist illustrations to complement its portrayal of death as a child. In contrast, *Duck, Death and the Tulip* utilizes soft shades and delicate illustrations to create a comforting and thoughtful atmosphere around the topic of death.

These narratives are not just stories; they serve as platforms where literature and philosophy intersect harmoniously by blending narrative engagement with deep philosophical inquiry. Literature traditionally engages through stories and emotional resonance, inviting readers to experience life's mysteries via empathetic connections with characters. Philosophy, on the other hand, approaches these questions through abstract reasoning and conceptual analysis, aiming for clarity and theoretical understanding. By integrating philosophical questions within engaging narratives, the books under examination manage to encourage both emotional empathy and intellectual curiosity. They make philosophical themes tangible by illustrating universal concepts through personal, narrative-driven experiences. Through their distinct approaches, these books destigmatize death, presenting it as a universal and immutable truth. This philosophical framing allows children to perceive death through a lens of acceptance and curiosity, rather than fear. As characters in the stories explore and come to terms with the notion of mortality, the line between storytelling and philosophical exploration blurs, enriching the reader's comprehension of life and existence. Especially for children, this interaction with the text stimulates a process of introspection and self-reflection.

From the data of the present study, it emerges that contemporary picturebooks can open alternative ways of constructing and representing the concept of death, particularly in the gap between the words and the images which results in opportunities for different kinds of knowledge and for different ways of speech and thinking. Finally, the studied picturebooks, each in its own way, trigger the philosophical investigation of the concept of death and through their philosophical receptors encourage children to give meaning to their knowledge and their existence as well.

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Zum Greifen nah: Visionen der Unsterblichkeit

Dominik Becher

Dieser Aufsatz beschreibt aktuelle Überzeugungen der (baldigen) Verfügbarkeit von Unsterblichkeit und bettet diese Hoffnung in die Kulturgeschichte mythischer und spekulativer Erzählungen des Traums von Unsterblichkeit ein. Als Ausgangspunkt dient das Gilgamesh*-Epos, gegenwärtige Beispiele sind der zeitgenössische Science-Fiction-Roman* Die Kinder der Zeit*, das Computerspiel* Cyberpunk 2077 *und eine Passage aus der Serienadaption von Neil Gaimans* Der Sandmann*-Comic. Diese Werke wurden ausgewählt, um die These zu stützen, dass sich die Menschheit gegenwärtig einer konkreten Vorstellbarkeit von Unsterblichkeit annähert.*

This essay describes current beliefs in the (imminent) availability of immortality and embeds this hope in the cultural history of mythical and speculative narratives of the all-too-human dream of immortality. The starting point is the Epic of Gilgamesh*, with contemporary examples being the modern science fiction novel* Children of Time*, the popular video game* Cyberpunk 2077*, and a passage from the series adaptation of Neil Gaiman's* The Sandman *comic. These works were selected to support the thesis that humanity is currently approaching a concrete conceptualization of immortality.*

Einleitung

> Sechs tage lang weinte ich um ihn und sieben nächte.
> Ich ließ seinen leichnam erst begraben,
> als ihm eine made aus dem nasenloch fiel.
>
> Dann überkam mich die angst, daß auch ich sterben könnte;
> ich begann mich vor dem tod zu fürchten und durch die wildnis zu wandern,
> was meinem freund zustieß, war zu viel, um es zu ertragen… (Schrott 250)

Bereits Gilgamesh wird durch die Erkenntnis des Todes zur Heldenreise motiviert. Seit Beginn der Literatur wird die Menschheit also von der Suche nach Unsterblichkeit um- und angetrieben.[1] Besonders aktuell vereinen sich wissenschaftliche und technologische Durchbrüche, Demographie und hyperkonzentriertes Kapital zu transhumanistischen Sichtweisen auf das Thema, welche sich fantastischer und spekulativer Tropen aus literarisch inspirierten Erzählungen bedienen. Diese wiederum befeuern das Narrativ von der Erreichbarkeit der Unsterblichkeit. Um diesen Ideen-Kreislauf sichtbar zu machen, schlägt der folgende Aufsatz einen Bogen durch die Menschheitsgeschichte von *Gilgamesh* in die Gegenwart, wo gerade die nächste große technologische Errungenschaft in Form von generativen Sprachmodellen, gemeinhin als künstliche Intelligenz verstanden, auch dem Unsterblichkeits-Diskurs neue utopische Impulse verleiht. Als beispielhafte Unsterblichkeits-Erzählungen dienen das *Gilgamesh*-Epos, der Science-Fiction-Roman *Die Kinder der Zeit*, das Computerspiel *Cyberpunk 2077* und eine Passage aus der Serienadaption des Comics *Der Sandmann*. Die Auszüge sind so gewählt, dass sie die These einer tatsächlichen gegenwärtigen Annäherung an die Denk- und Erfahrbarkeit konkreter Formen der Unsterblichkeit ernst nehmen und dadurch den Diskurs bereichern sollen.

Der Beitrag bewegt sich zwischen Wissenschaft, Populärwissenschaft und Fiktion: Eine seriöse wissenschaftliche Haltung zur Unsterblichkeit ginge heutzutage davon aus, dass es erstrebenswert sei, die *Gesundheitsspanne* des Menschen mit, zum Beispiel, medizinischen Bestrebung zu maximieren (vgl. Srinivasan). Gesundheitsspanne ist die Zeit im Leben, die wir selbstbestimmt, nicht gebrechlich leben. Die Demographie zeigt, dass, sozusagen als ungewollter Nebeneffekt der steigenden Gesundheitsspanne, sich auch die *Lebensspanne* verlängert. Forschung, die sich explizit der Verlängerung der Lebensspanne widmet, bewegt sich in einem ethisch problematischen Grenzgebiet: Sie wird massiv betrieben und gefördert, ist aber oft privatwirtschaftlich finanziert und wird teils zu Recht kritisch betrachtet (siehe Anhang, vgl. Scott & deFrancesco; vgl. Krieger; vgl.

1 Als Minimaldefinition sei Unsterblichkeit hier verstanden als Permanenz des Subjektes, also dem Traum, dass das Ich in der Zeit überdauern könnte.

Weiß). Noch darüberhinausgehend wird *Unsterblichkeitsforschung* explizit betrieben. Diese ist von literarischen Utopien geleitet und verortet sich im Bereich zwischen ernsthafter Grundlagenforschung, Fiktion und Scharlatanerie. Wie dieser Artikel veranschaulicht, ist Unsterblichkeitsforschung als Grenzbereich zwischen Wissenschaft und Vision ein Einfallstor für und der Wirkungsbereich von Literatur auf wissenschaftliche Paradigmen.

Gilgamesh

Zu den Anfängen: Der zweite Teil des *Gilgamesh*-Epos ist eine Reise in die Welt der Götter auf der Suche nach Unsterblichkeit. Der Held trauert im eingangs gewählten Zitat um den gestorbenen Freund und Bruder Enkidu, erkennt also im Tod des Anderen die eigene Sterblichkeit. Aus seiner Trauer wird Angst. Aus Angst wird schließlich Tatendrang: „Wie könnte ich schweigen? Wie könnte ich ruhig sein?“ (251).

Der initiale heroische Moment liegt in der Erkenntnis der eigenen Vergänglichkeit, gepaart mit der Rebellion gegen das naturgegebene Schicksal: Wir sind geboren, um zu sterben, der mythische Held aber lehnt sich auf. Eine aus heutiger Sicht interessante Feststellung kann gewonnen werden, wenn man bedenkt, dass Gilgamesh selbst bereits ein Zwei-Drittel-Gott ist (Ashfrafian). Es ist aus vielfältigen Erzählungen von Halbgöttern bekannt, dass göttliche Wesen, die sich mit Sterblichen einlassen, gemeinhin sterbliche Nachkommen zeugen. In genetischer Metaphorik könnte man dies heute so ausdrücken: Wenn es so etwas wie ein Unsterblichkeits-Chromosom gäbe, das nach Mendelschen Gesetzen vererbbar wäre, dann bedeutete dies, dass Unsterblichkeit ‚rezessiv‘ ist, und Sterblichkeit das ‚dominante Gen‘. Dieser Gedanke ist kulturgeschichtlich als Fluch der Sterblichen in Erscheinung getreten, deren Blut das der Götter ‚verwässert‘. Das historische Gefälle zwischen Sterblichen und Göttern ist enorm, doch wie wir am Beispiel des *Sandman* sehen werden, ändert sich dieses Paradigma gegenwärtig. Gilgamesh weiß ebenso, dass es anders sein kann, denn unter seinen Vorfahren sind auch Götter. Einer war sogar sterblich (263): Dies ist Gilga-

meshs Großvater Utnapishti, der die Sintflut überlebte. Utnapishtis Geschichte ist die des Noah, er baute ein Floß, um den als göttliche Strafe gesandten Wassermassen zu entkommen. Als Folge wurde Utnapishti durch göttlichen Ratschluss in den Stand der Unsterblichkeit erhoben, da die Götter sich keinen Fehler eingestehen konnten: Wenn es das Ziel war, die Menschheit auszulöschen, dann gelang es ihnen letztlich dadurch, dass sie dem cleveren Überlebenden die Unsterblichkeit schenkten. Auf diese paradoxe Weise erfüllten sie ihr Wort. Hier sehen wir den Stellenwert des Geschenks: Unsterbliche stehen rasch auf einer Stufe mit den Göttern.

Gilgamesh gelangt zu Utnapishti und der weise Großvater zeigt ihm eine andere Möglichkeit der Unsterblichkeit: Gilgamesh solle dafür den Schlaf beherrschen und sieben Tage und Nächte kein Auge schließen. Er versagt unmittelbar und schläft ein (263). Damit er dennoch nicht unverrichteter Dinge abziehen muss, weisen seine Großeltern ihm noch einen dritten, vielversprechenden Weg in Form einer Heilpflanze. Das Motiv der Verjüngung taucht auf, die Idee des Alters als Krankheit. Die geradezu botanisch anmutende Beschreibung, „[e]ine pflanze gibt es, die aussieht wie der buchsdorn; sie hat stacheln wie die hundsrose und sticht, wenn man sie pflückt“ (266), deutet sich beinahe als eine pseudo-pragmatische Ebene des Mythos in Form eines Rezeptes oder einer Gebrauchsanweisung: Geschichten von der Unsterblichkeit liebäugeln mit deren Verfügbarkeit. Gilgamesh findet die Heilpflanze, aber als er danach greift, kommt unversehens eine Schlange herbei und stiehlt ihm, ihre Haut abwerfend, das Kraut der ewigen Jugend vor der Nase weg (267). Dies ist das titelgebende Bild des vorliegenden Aufsatzes, es kodiert das Gefühl des *beinahen* Zugriffs auf die Unsterblichkeit: Man wähnte sich schon *immer* der Unsterblichkeit zum Greifen nah!

Der Held wütet und erkennt nicht, dass sein Handeln kulturstiftend dazu beigetragen hat, dass ein Stückchen vom Gedanken der Unsterblichkeit in die Welt gekommen ist und sei es nur in der Erklärung der abgestreiften Schlangenhaut als ‚Verjüngung‘ des Tieres. Vielmehr bringt die vergebliche Heldenreise eine andere Erkenntnis hervor: die Besinnung auf das Hier und Jetzt. So endet auch das Epos damit, dass sich Gilgamesh fortan auf seine welt-

liche Herrschaft konzentriert und ein legendärer König wird. Die letzten Verse beschreiben das unglaubliche Ausmaß und die Macht der selbst mythischen Stadt Uruk, die er errichtet. Seine Form der Unsterblichkeit ist der Ruhm.

Zusammenfassend können wir feststellen, dass neben der allgemeinen Suche nach Unsterblichkeit auch das Motiv der Beherrschung des Schlafes im Mythos angelegt ist, die medizinische Verjüngung ebenso wie der übernatürliche Göttersegen und die schöpferische Involviertheit des Menschen als Ergebnis heroischer Anstrengungen beim Versuch, das Unmögliche zu erreichen. In diesem Sinne ist der Tod die große Triebkraft und metaphysische Kritiken an tendenziell größenwahnsinnigen Unterfangen der Gegenwart beruhen oft auf der Annahme, dass ewiges Leben statisch und sinnentleert wäre und neben pragmatischen Problemen wie der Überbevölkerung vor allem aber ewige Langeweile und Antriebslosigkeit für die Menschheit bedeuten würde.[2] Letztere Idee ist etwa in der Stadt der unsterblichen Troglodyten in J.L. Borges' Kurzgeschichte „El Inmortal" eindrucksvoll geschildert.

Experten der Unsterblichkeit: Vom Mythos zum Silicon Valley

Die Suche nach Unsterblichkeit als kulturgeschichtlicher Treibstoff lässt sich durch viele menschliche Lebensbereiche verfolgen. Sie ist inhärent in Religion, etwa dem Konzept der Ewigen Seele und allen jenseitigen Welten und Totenreichen; sie ist in der Medizin zum Symbol des Lebenserhalts geworden, man denke an die Schlange, die sich um den Äskulapstab windet. Magie und Technologie werden als pragmatische Methoden teils der Suche nach Unsterblichkeit gewidmet. Wirtschaftliches Handeln erhöht Lebensstandards und damit Lebenserwartung. Das Spiel, die Imagination und der Glaube enthalten Praktiken, die dem Unsterblichkeitsgedanken emotionale Wahrhaftigkeit verleihen. Nicht zuletzt erweist sich die Kunst als bisher erfolgreichste Unsterblichkeitstechnik des Men-

2 Für die detaillierte Analyse von Texten, in denen Unsterblichkeit derart negativ konnotiert ist, siehe die Beiträge von Kristin Aubel und Raphaela Behounek in diesem Band.

schen: Gilgamesh, als literarischer Ur-Text ein 4000 Jahre altes Artefakt, ist in unserem kulturellen Gedächtnis bis heute ‚lebendig', auf meta-narrativer Ebene sogar konkret, wie wir zum Beispiel in der Verwendung seines Namens für das Raumschiff im Abschnitt über die *Kinder der Zeit* sehen werden. Die kunstvolle Erzählung bewahrt Emotionen zum Thema der Unsterblichkeit, die nichts an Aktualität verloren haben: *vita breve, ars longa*.

Heutzutage ist hingegen die technologische Unsterblichkeit *en vogue*, insbesondere im Silicon Valley. Sie ist einerseits von Mythologisierung und Verklärung betroffen, andererseits scheinen technologische Fortschritte auch konkreten Anlass zu geben, das Thema neu zu bewerten. Befeuert unter anderem von der Genetik (beispielsweise durch das *human genome project* oder *crispr*) sowie vom Medizin-Nobelpreis 2009 zu Telomeren und Telomerase ist das Thema zu neuer Relevanz gelangt. Auch die seit 2022 ins öffentliche Bewusstsein gerückten Fortschritte in der generativen künstlichen Intelligenz entfachen ein neues Interesse an Unsterblichkeit und künstlichen Menschen.[3] Dies manifestiert sich zum Beispiel in einem ganzen Komplex von Forschungseinrichtungen, Industrien und nicht zuletzt populärwissenschaftlichen Schriften und Medienproduktionen zu diesem Thema – einen Eindruck davon geben die im Anhang versammelten Sachbücher und die Liste der Unsterblichkeits-Start-Ups, hauptsächlich aus dem Umfeld des Silicon Valley. Vor allem dort verwurzelten transhumanistischen Thesen zufolge, allen voran denjenigen von Ettinger, Minsky, Bostrom, Kurzweil (vgl. Krüger 61-87), sei es in der Menschheitsgeschichte nun nicht mehr weit, bis zur Erlangung der ‚Unsterblichkeit' – diesmal aber wirklich und auf wissenschaftlich-technologischem Fortschritt gegründet. Zu den kulturgeschichtlich weiterhin wirksamen mythischen, magischen, spirituellen und religiösen Unsterblichkeitsvorstellungen gesellt sich heute der Posthumanismus mit seinen technologischen Hoffnungen (vgl. Krüger 91-113).

Der direkte Einfluss von Science-Fiction-Literatur auf die Mentalität des Silicon Valley ist vielfältig nachweisbar: so wurde das erste Motorola Klapp-Handy etwa direkt von Star Trek beeinflusst (Sloane

3 Für eine detaillierte Analyse von künstlichen Menschen in der Science Fiction siehe den Beitrag von Stefan Lampadius in diesem Band.

137-39) und Science-Fiction gehört zu den bevorzugten Genres von Tech Geeks.[4] Oftmals liegt es nahe, zunächst die Richtung eines Transfers von Ideen aus der spekulativen Literatur heraus in die technologische Wirklichkeit zu betrachten. Jules Vernes Werke etwa nähmen Raumfahrt und Unterseebote vorweg; George Orwell hätte den medientechnischen Überwachungsstaat vorausgesagt, das Smartphone hat ihn umgesetzt; Karel Čapek, Stanislaw Lem und Isaac Asimov präfigurierten in ihrer Literatur humanoide Roboter, die wiederum Firmen wie Hanson Robotics oder Boston Dynamics und viele andere gegenwärtig konstruieren. Fiktion als Prognose der Wirklichkeit zu betrachten, greift aber zu kurz. Vielmehr besteht eine dialektische Wechselwirkung zwischen den Polen der Imagination und der Realität. Auf der Seite des Imaginären speisen Menschheitsträume und Mythen die spekulativen und fantastischen Erzählungen, auf der Seite der Realität bedingen (wissenschaftliche) Wirklichkeitsparadigmen und konkrete (technologische) Lebenswelt deren jeweilige (literarische) Erscheinungsform. Daraus ergibt sich, dass Literatur an *beiden* Richtungen des Transfers (technologischer) Narrative und der in ihr enthaltenen Mytheme beteiligt ist. Dies soll im Folgenden mit Hilfe von drei Beispielen illustriert werden.

Ausloten der Unsterblichkeit: *Kinder der Zeit*

Für Science-Fiction-Literatur, die sich mit Raumfahrt beschäftigt, sind Unsterblichkeitstechnologien oftmals Grundannahmen, denn nur unter der Voraussetzung extremer Langlebigkeit können menschliche oder menschenähnliche Protagonisten überhaupt ‚glaubwürdig' in kosmischen räumlichen und zeitlichen Maßstäben handeln. Hier begegnen uns verschiedene (technologische) Konzepte von Unsterblichkeit, wie sie in Adrian Tchaikovskys *Kinder der Zeit-Reihe* nebeneinander gestellt werden. Die Romantrilogie (*Children of Time* (2015), *Children of Ruin* (2019) und *Children of*

4 Eingehend mit Biografien auseinandergesetzt hat sich zum Beispiel Krüger in *Virtual Immortality: God, Evolution and the Singularity in Post- and Transhumanism*. Vgl. auch McAfee.

Memory (2022)) wurde 2023 mit der Hugo-Auszeichnung als beste Serie geehrt. Im ersten Roman treffen Kälteschlaf (oder Stasis), Kybernetik (künstliche Intelligenz) und Biotechnologie (Genetik) als zentrale Technologien und Handlungselemente aufeinander. Sie ergeben ein Panorama, welches es erlaubt, die damit verbundenen unterschiedlichen Modi der Subjektpermanenz gegeneinander abzuwägen.

Tchaikovskys Roman folgt der Überlebensreise der Menschheit nach einer selbstverschuldeten Katastrophe auf der Erde. Das Raumschiff *Gilgamesh*,[5] das die letzte Chance der Menschheit repräsentiert, setzt seine Hoffnung auf bewohnbar gemachte Planeten (*terraforming*) der irdischen Vorgängerzivilisation. Diese Vorfahren zerstörten sich in einem Bürgerkrieg selbst, der bezeichnenderweise von Widerständen gegen die transhumanistische, kosmische Anpassung des Menschen ausgelöst wurde. Tchaikovsky suggeriert also, dass an diesem Thema eine ganze Zivilisation scheitern könnte: Es standen reaktionäre Kräfte, die den Erhalt des ‚natürlichen' Menschseins befürworteten, progressiven Wissenschaftlern gegenüber, die das Universum mit neuem, kaum noch als ‚menschlich' zu bezeichnendem Leben bevölkern wollten:

> Die *Non-Ultra-Natura*-Lobby war nur die extremste Partei in einer Allianz aus Konservativen, ewiggestrigen Philosophen und unbelehrbaren Frömmlern, denen zum Thema Fortschritt nur einfiel, dass es irgendwann auch mal genug sein müsse, die sich mit Zähnen und Klauen gegen eine weitere Verbesserung des menschlichen Genoms wehrten, und die um jeden Preis die Beschränkung von künstlicher Intelligenz aufrechterhalten und Programme wie das von Avrana verhindern wollten. (Tchaikovsky 15)

Protagonist und zentrales Symbol der (Überlebens-)Reise der *Gilgamesh* ist Holston Mason, der letzte Philologe und Geisteswissenschaftler, über 1800 Jahre alt, der beständig in Stasis versetzt und nur dann geweckt wird, wenn die Crew des Generationenschif-

5 Tchaikovskys Rückgriff auf den Namen des mythischen Helden ist gewiss kein Zufall, sondern gute ‚wissenschaftliche' Tradition in der mythologischen Benennung von Galaxien, Planeten oder eben Raumschiffen, hier mit klarer Referenz zur Suche nach Unsterblichkeit.

fes, bestehend aus Mechanikern und Ingenieuren, mit einem unlösbaren historischen oder linguistischen Problem konfrontiert wird. Sein Erwachen auf der *Gilgamesh* liest sich wie folgt:

> Wie ein hundertjähriger Krüppel ruderte er herum, kämpfte sich mühsam aus dem sargförmigen Tank, der … wie lange seine Heimstatt gewesen war?
> […]
> „Eintausendachthundertsiebendundreißig Jahre, Mason. Jedenfalls sagt das die *Gilgamesh*." (47-48)

Mason fleht geradezu um auch nur einen kurzen Aufschub vor der neuerlichen Stasis (53), denn der Kälteschlaf ist eine Form der Unsterblichkeit, in der die Gedächtnislücken größer sind als die gelebte Zeit. Es ist eine furchterregende Erfahrung:

> „Warum?"
> „Weil es kalt ist. Weil es ist, als wäre man tot. Weil ich Angst davor habe, nie wieder aufzuwachen – oder dass du mich nicht weckst. Weil ich Angst habe." Holsten zuckte leicht mit den Achseln: „Später ist noch genug Zeit, um zu schlafen, oder? Lassen Sie mich doch wenigstens die Sterne ansehen, nur eine halbe Wache, dann buchte ich mich selbst ein. Was kann es schon schaden?" (53)

In diesem Modus, der die Lebensspanne nicht verlängert, sondern immer wieder unterbricht, wird die Lebenserfahrung zur Aneinanderkettung utilitaristischer und krisenhafter Momente, und der Imperativ des *carpe diem* wird absolut und oppressiv: Für Muse und Menschsein bleibt keine Zeit. Auf diese Weise steht auch die Frage im Raum nach einer maximalen menschlichen Kapazität, wieviel Unsterblichkeit überhaupt zu ertragen möglich sei.[6]

Die zweite Form der Unsterblichkeit des Romans erscheint wenig attraktiver: Als die *Gilgamesh* ihren Zielplaneten erreicht, begegnet die Besatzung Avra Kern, der letzten Überlebenden der ursprünglichen Menschheit und wissenschaftlichen Leiterin des Kolonisa-

6 Die technologische Erfahrung des Kälteschlafs korrespondiert hier mit der magischen Langlebigkeit von etwa Bilbo Beutlin durch den einen Ring, welche äquivalent geschildert wird: "Why, I feel all thin, sort of stretched, if you know what I mean: like butter that has been scraped over too much bread" (Tolkien 32); vgl. auch Nelson.

tionsprojektes. Diese ist ebenfalls in einem Lebenserhaltungssystem eingefroren, jedoch zusätzlich mit einer hoch entwickelten KI verschmolzen. Die (beschädigte) KI war auf menschliche Intuition angewiesen, um improvisierte Entscheidungen treffen zu können. Dieses Problem wurde durch die Simulation des Geistes der Wissenschaftlerin Avra Kern behoben. Das heißt, auf dieser Rettungskapsel existieren fortan der eingefrorene Mensch, verbunden mit dem simulierten Geist dieses Menschen und einer lebenserhaltenden KI; alle drei sind zu einem unsterblichen Wesen miteinander verschränkt. Das Ergebnis ist die äußerst schizophrene Antagonistin der *Gilgamesh*. Dies ist die erste Nachricht, welche die *Gilgamesh* von der Rettungskapsel empfängt; das typografische Nebeneinander unterstreicht die Gleichzeitigkeit der Bewusstseinsebenen:

Sie befinden sich derzeit auf Kurs, der sie zu einem unter Quarantäne stehenden Planeten bringen wird	Kalt so kalt so lang warten warum kommen sie nicht was ist passiert können wirklich alle fort sein ist dann gar niemand übrig (102)

Links steht die automatisierte Nachricht des Lebenserhaltungssystems mit dem simultan darunter liegenden Bewusstseinsstrom Avra Kerns rechts. Man kann eine Freudsche Aufteilung dieses unsterblichen Cyborgs in das ICH (KI, Gesamtheit), das ÜBER-ICH (funktionale, regelbasierte Simulation; linke Spalte) und das ES vornehmen. Was hier vom ursprünglich menschlichen Bewusstsein übrig bleibt, ist ES, das im höchsten Maß traumatisierte und irrationale Unterbewusstsein der Maschine (rechte Spalte).

Die dritte Form der Unsterblichkeit im Roman ist die Folge eines sogenannten Uplift-Experiments, das heißt, einer künstlich beschleunigten Evolution durch ein Virus, welches die Entwicklung von Intelligenz forcieren soll. Dadurch würden sich auf dem Planeten angesiedelte Affen in wenigen Jahrtausenden zu einer neuen Form des Homo sapiens ‚erheben' (='uplift'). Leider haben die Affen den Bürgerkrieg nicht überlebt und das Virus fand einen Wirt in Spinnen: Das Ergebnis nach Jahrtausenden ist eine intelligente Spinnen-Zivilisation, deren Aufstieg der Leser verfolgt. Die intelligenten Spinnen entwickeln eine eigene Form der Unsterblichkeit:

Sie sind begabte Biotechnologen und können auf biochemische Weise Informationen kodieren und zwischen lebenden Individuen teilen. Bei der Übertragung von Persönlichkeitsmerkmalen entsteht im Sinne der Unsterblichkeit ein Konzept, das wir als ‚Wiedergeburt' beschreiben können. Die gesamte Kulturgeschichte der Spinnenzivilisation wird folglich von der Protagonistin Portia – der wissenschaftliche Name einer Gattung von Springspinnen – erzählt, deren Erinnerungen, Wesen und Fertigkeiten erfolgreich weitergegeben werden. Wir erleben in der Leseerfahrung den Anthropomorphismus, den wir verspüren, wenn wir zum Beispiel mit ChatBots reden: Wo wir eine Intelligenz vermuten, vermuten wir ein uns ähnliches Gegenüber. Die anfangs fremdartige Spinnenwelt wird umso verständlicher und sympathischer, je mehr rationale und emotionale Anknüpfungspunkte die immer schlauer werdende Portia und das Fortschreiten der Handlung den Rezipient*innen bietet. Der Roman endet mit dem Höhepunkt der Konfrontation zwischen den drei Erzählsträngen und den korrespondierenden Formen der Unsterblichkeit in einer finalen Synthese. Die Modi der Stasis, des Upload/Simulation und der gentechnischen Reinkarnation werden technologisch und psychologisch gegenübergestellt und die organische Form der Unsterblichkeit erweist sich als fähig, die anderen Formen zu integrieren: Das erfolgreiche Modell der Unsterblichkeit ist hier das dem Leben zugewandte, evolutionäre, welches den Spannungsbogen zwischen Permanenz des Subjektes und Entwicklung der Spezies aufzulösen vermag.

In diesem Sinne kann spekulative, fantastische und Science-Fiction-Literatur ein erkundendes Spiel mit dem Gedanken der Unsterblichkeit sein. Wir erleben hier im Sinne der These des Artikels den Beitrag der Literatur zur ‚Erforschung', Ausdifferenzierung, Weiterentwicklung, wissenschaftlich-technologischen Deutung und Plausibilisierung der Unsterblichkeit.

An der Unsterblichkeit (glorreich) zu Grunde gehen: *Cyberpunk 2077*

Nehmen wir an, Spielen sei eine Technologie nicht nur des Lernens, sondern auch der Unsterblichkeit, dann macht Spielen also Unsterblichkeit erfahrbar. Wenn man Huizingas oder Caillois' anthropologischem Essentialismus des Spieles in Form des *homo ludens* folgt, ist das Spiel eine (menschliche) Form, auch dem Tod zu begegnen (vgl. Huizinga 4-5, 15, 89-104). Das symbolische Spiel hingegen ist eine essentielle Form des Lernens und der psychologischen Entwicklung (vgl. Piaget). Caillois beobachtet das rauschhafte Spiel (*ilinx*) auch im Tierreich (Caillois 48-49). Viele Tiere, und nicht nur Säugetiere, spielen in einem Raum des Lernens und Erprobens und Patrick Bateson spekuliert sogar über die Rolle des Spielens in der Evolution (Bateson in Pellegrini und Smith 13-24; vgl. auch Burghardt; Power).

Im Schachspiel, der ewigen Schlacht zweier Heere, stehen die Figuren immer wieder auf. Im freien Kinderspiel – „Peng, Peng, du bist tot! --- Nein, bin ich nicht!" – ist der Tod verhandelbar. Kurzum: Spielen kann eine Form sein, Unsterblichkeit zu simulieren. In Computerspielen gibt es folglich Speicherfunktionen, Lebenspunkte, Extraleben und viele weitere Metaphern dieses Prinzips. Darüber hinaus sind (Computer-)Spiele in Bezug auf künstliche Intelligenz und Unsterblichkeit bedeutsam: Zum Beispiel messen wir den Fortschritt von KIs daran, wie sie die besten menschlichen Spieler*innen in gewissen regelbasierten Spielarten nach und nach übertreffen. Für die aufkeimende künstliche Intelligenz ist das Computerspiel ein ideales Experimentierfeld, vielleicht sogar Wiege, gewiss jedoch ein Indikator ihrer Fortschritte (vgl. Flaherty, Jemenez und Abbasi). Auch immer realistischere Grafik und Interaktionsmöglichkeiten von Computerspielen scheinen die technologische Singularität, welche den Zusammenfall von Realität und Virtualität impliziert, vorwegzunehmen und voranzutreiben. Nicht zuletzt basieren die großen Rechenanlagen, welche die ersten leistungsfähigen *Large Language Models* trainiert haben, auf dem Zusammenschluss zahlloser Hochleistungsgrafikkarten, hervorgegan-

gen aus der Computerspielindustrie. Computerspiele sind also ein integraler Bestandteil dieser technologischen Entwicklungen.

Auf der narrativen Ebene erlauben Computerspiele immer dynamischere und komplexere interaktive Erzählungen, wie etwa *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020), das sich zentral des Themas der Unsterblichkeit annimmt.[7] Wir erleben aus der Ich-Perspektive von V eine dystopische Geschichte, in der V zufälliges Opfer eines Unsterblichkeitschips, des sogenannten Relic wird. Darauf ist eine Persönlichkeit in Form eines sogenannten Engramms gespeichert. V als typische*r leere*r Protagonist*in ist die unbeschriebene Projektionsfläche der Spieler*innen, die im Verlauf der Handlung von der abgespeicherten Persönlichkeit des fiktiven Johnny Silverhand zunehmend übernommen werden. Spieler*in und virtuelle Figur ringen im Verlauf der Handlung um die Kontrolle über den gleichen Körper. Das Spiel setzt sich zentral mit den Konsequenzen solch einer Technologie auseinander. Zu Beginn kann man in einer Fernsehshow einer Debatte darüber folgen:[8]

> Ziggy: Karina, was genau ist *Relic*? Mit einem Wort, wenn du kannst.
>
> Karina: Mit einem Wort? Ich würde sagen: Unsterblichkeit.
>
> Ziggy: Unsterblichkeit? Wirklich?
>
> Karina: Ja, das ist richtig. Mit dem *Relic* kann man das Bewusstsein einer sterbenden Person speichern, um ein neues Zuhause für ihre Seele auf einem übertragbaren Chip zu finden...
>
> Reverend: Dieses *Relic* ist eine Abscheulichkeit, die sich von menschlichem Elend ernährt. Es ist ein unnatürliches Abbild, ein goldenes Kalb, geboren von falschen Propheten. Arasaka spricht davon, die Seele zu bewahren, aber mehr können sie nicht versprechen, als einen herzlosen, geistlosen Algorithmus, der mit der Stimme der Verstorbenen spricht.

7 Das Genre des Cyberpunk steht dem Thema insgesamt sehr nahe. Vgl. auch die Romane *Neuromancer* (William Gibson) oder *Altered Carbon* (Richard K. Morgan). Vgl. zu beiden Romanen auch den Beitrag von Stefan Lampadius in diesem Band.

8 Die debattierenden Figuren sind Ziggy Q (TV-Moderator, N54 News), Karina Lee (Chip-In Programm, pro Cyberware TV-Show, N54) und Reverend Colver (Televangelist, Präsident der Kirche von El Yahu, dem Letzten Emanzipator). Fanseiten wie https://cyberpunk.fandom.com/wiki/Category:Cyberpunk_2077_Characters geben einen guten Überblick über die dramatis personae des Spiels.

> Mehr noch, diese Technologie ist nur ein weiteres Instrument für Zwang und Korruption. Nur die wohlhabenden und mächtigen Eliten werden Zugang haben, und sie werden jeden Preis zahlen für die Chance auf diese sogenannte Unsterblichkeit. (*Cyberpunk 2077*)

Das Spiel macht im Verlauf viele weitere Angebote, sich mit dem Thema Unsterblichkeit auseinanderzusetzen und es zu vertiefen, etwa eine kurze Diskussion mit buddhistischen Mönchen über die Digitalisierung, welche zum folgenden Dialog zwischen V und Johnny führt:

> V: Was denkst du, Johnny? Bist du einfach du oder eine Kopie?
> Johnny: Was für einen Unterschied macht das? Du hast ihn gehört, ich bin in ein paar Zeilen Code, gefangen in deinem Körper.
> V: Vielleicht ist Johnny Silverhand wirklich tot? Vielleicht bist du nur eine… naja…
> Johnny: Was? Imitation? Ist es das, was du sagen wolltest? Wenn der „echte" Johnny Silverhand tot ist, dann ist das sein Problem. Nicht meins. (*Cyberpunk 2077*)

Wo liegt der Unterschied, wenn das fortbestehende Simulacrum nicht vom verstorbenen Original zu differenzieren ist? Das Spiel beantwortet die Frage dystopisch: Durch seine Handlungen entscheidet man sich zwischen sechs verschiedenen, eindrucksvoll inszenierten Arten, wie man an dieser Unsterblichkeit zugrunde gehen will und welche der im Verlaufe der Handlung vielleicht sogar liebgewonnenen Nebenfiguren vom Strudel der Ereignisse mit in den Untergang gerissen werden. Obwohl die genretypische Kritik an der (neoliberalen) Übermacht globaler Konzern-Eliten (vgl. Alphin 129-33), welche letztlich allein vom Unsterblichkeitschip profitieren, die zentrale Botschaft ist, ermöglicht die bloße Existenz dieser Technologie jedoch überhaupt erst das (tragische) Heldentum der Allerwelts-Protagonist*in V. Das Narrativ ist auch hier ein – wenn auch unfreiwilliges – Greifen nach der Unsterblichkeit. Insbesondere Spieler, die das Spiel nicht nur einmal spielen, sondern, wie von den Produzenten durch die verschiedenen Enden intendiert, mehrmals, um die verschiedenen Nuancen des Themas zu erfahren, erleben dabei eine eindringliche, facettenreiche Simulation der Relevanz von Unsterblichkeit und können emotional ganz

unterschiedliche Haltungen dazu durchleben – von der Kritik an der Technologie und Ambition selbst bis hin zu deren Triumph oder Zerstörung. Allen Varianten des Spielendes gemein bleibt das Erhabene der Unsterblichkeitstechnologie angesichts ihrer furchtbaren, heroischen Schönheit. Mindestens in diesem Sinne kann man das Computerspiel *Cyberpunk 2077* als einen Beitrag zur (kritischen) Konkretisierung des Menschheitstraumes von Unsterblichkeit lesen.

Die Normalisierung der Unsterblichkeit: *Der Sandmann*

Traditionell sind im Fantastischen unsterbliche Wesen negativ konnotiert, vor allem solche, die selbst einmal sterblich waren: denken wir an Ahasver, den Ancient Mariner, Faust, Frankensteins Monster, Graf Dracula, Dorian Gray, Gollum, Jadis, El Inmortal, Lord Voldemort und viele mehr. Neil Gaimans *The Sandman* steht hier Pate für die Möglichkeit gegenwärtiger Erzählungen, den Aufstieg des Menschen zur konkreten, körperlichen Ewigkeit durchweg positiv zu wenden und dabei zu ‚mythologisieren', und zwar gerade deshalb, weil Unsterblichkeit heutzutage als etwas Plausibles und Banales erscheinen kann. Dafür steht in *The Sandman* exemplarisch die Figur Robert Gadlings, wie wir ihn in der Serienadaption des Comics in der Folge „The Sound of Her Wings" erleben. Die Handlung der Episode beginnt im Jahr 1389 in einem englischen Pub, wo Dream (Morpheus) und seine Geschwister Death an einem Tisch sitzen und den Gesprächen der Sterblichen zuhören. Robert „Hob" Gadling, ein junger, lebenslustiger Mann, behauptet lautstark, dass der Tod nur eine von der Obrigkeit aufgezwungene Erfindung sei und er sich entschieden habe, einfach nicht zu sterben. Death findet diese Idee amüsant und schlägt Dream vor, Hob Unsterblichkeit zu gewähren, um zu sehen, ob er tatsächlich ewig leben möchte. Dream, neugierig auf das menschliche Verhalten, stimmt zu.

Zentral für die Handlung der Episode ist der Moment, in dem Robert Gadling, auf Augenhöhe mit dem unsterblichen Dream, um dessen Freundschaft buhlt und dabei auch nach Jahrhunderten

keinerlei Anzeichen von ‚Lebensmüdigkeit' zeigt, sondern ganz im Gegenteil von unbändiger Lebenslust erfüllt ist:

> Robert: Ich glaube, ich weiß, warum wir uns alle 100 Jahre hier treffen. Nicht, weil Ihr sehen wollt, ob ich bereit für den Tod bin. Ich glaube nicht, dass ich ihn jemals will. Das wisst Ihr über mich. Ich glaube, Ihr seid wegen etwas anderem hier.
>
> Dream: Was könnte das sein?
>
> Robert: Freundschaft? Ihr seid wohl einsam.
>
> Dream: Du wagst es . . . du wagst es zu sagen, einer wie *ich* könnte deine Kameradschaft benötigen?
>
> Robert: Ja, in der Tat. („Sound" 00:43:29 – 00:44:20)

Die Episode endet trotz des nun ausbrechenden Streits – Dream läuft eingeschnappt davon – schließlich versöhnlich. Die Unsterblichkeit verliert hier ihre außergewöhnliche Aura und wird zum alltäglichen Phänomen, ein Streit unter schließlich doch Freunden. Diese Darstellung steht im deutlichen Gegensatz zu überhöhten religiösen, spirituellen oder auch technologischen Verklärungen von Unsterblichkeit, wie sie in anderen Erzählungen weit verbreitet sind. Diese Überhöhung der Unsterblichkeit gründet sich zum guten Teil auf deren Unverfügbarkeit und die großen metaphysischen Opfer und Tabubrüche, die bisher zu ihrer Erlangung notwendig scheinen. Wir sehen hier das Ende der Erzählung von der erhabenen Unsterblichkeit aufleuchten: Bei Gaiman haben sich die Charaktere trotz jahrhundertelanger Bekanntschaft auch an der Bar nichts wirklich von Belang zu sagen. Und dennoch: Es ist der ‚erhobene', unsterblich gewordene Mensch, der hier mit Dream, der personifizierten Allegorie des Mythos selbst, spricht. Dadurch erhält die neue, banale Form der Unsterblichkeit ebenfalls Eingang in den Bereich des Mythischen. Dies öffnet den Weg für weitere Variationen einer selbstbewussten, humanen und vertraut erscheinenden Unsterblichkeit, hier in einer Form, die Viktor Hoffmann treffend auch als „Unsterbliche Sterbliche" charakterisiert (21-24; 285-90).

Fazit

Die Diagnose, Unsterblichkeit sei insbesondere heute ‚zum Greifen nah' konnte mit Verweis auf den Ursprungsmythos von Unsterblichkeitserzählungen relativiert werden, denn diese hoffnungsvolle Illusion hat eine lange Geschichte. Wer greifbare Unsterblichkeit verkaufen wollte, ging schon immer auf Narrenfang. Doch wie plausibel ist heutzutage die halb fiktive, transhumanistische These? Auf jeden Fall ist sie überzeugend genug, um ihre Spuren in der Darstellung der Wahrhaftigkeit von Unsterblichkeit innerhalb fantastischer und spekulativer Erzählungen zu hinterlassen. Die technologischen Möglichkeiten und der wissenschaftliche Erkenntnisstand bedingen die Nuancen und den Detailgrad der Geschichten, die wir in der Lage sind, über Unsterblichkeit zu erzählen. Drei bedeutende Erzählungen wurden vorgestellt, die neue Nuancen in die Betrachtung einbringen. Aktuelle Vorstellungswelten und konkrete technologische Entwicklungen zeigen sich dabei zugleich inspiriert von diesen Erzählungen und bieten ihrerseits neue Gelegenheiten, darüber erzählerisch nachzudenken: Die *Kinder der Zeit* stellen Unsterblichkeit als eine facettenreiche, aber evolutionär notwendige Entwicklung dar, *Cyberpunk 2077* entwirft einen performativ-digitalen, spielerischen Erfahrungsraum von Unsterblichkeit und der *Sandman* normalisiert Unsterblichkeit auf der Ebene der Mythen in seiner banalen, alltäglichen Begegnung damit, welche die existentielle Kluft zwischen Menschen und Göttern überwindet.

Schaut man sich abschließend die Vielfalt gegenwärtiger Prototypen von ‚Unsterblichkeitstechnologien' an, wie GriefTech oder Upload-Apps,[9] Meta-Humans und digitale Zwillinge, personalisierte ChatBots, personalisierte Medizin sowie immer smartere Geräte, so ist eines sicher: Das Thema Unsterblichkeit wird auch in Zukunft für neue, reichhaltige und fantastische Erzählungen sorgen.

9 Etwa: HereAfter.AI, Replika, longevity.ai, Mindbank.ai

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Immortality and Digital Rebirth in Science Fiction

Stefan Lampadius

Immortality and great longevity were long considered divine gifts of the immortals or, at least, supernatural phenomena, but they repeatedly appear within the reach of human power in science fiction. Beginning with Mary Shelley's foundational novel Frankenstein *(1818), the ambition of defying death is closely connected to the motif of the artificial human. In the context of the Digital Age, mind uploading has emerged as a related concept for artificial life extension or even as a digital rebirth. This article discusses mind uploading as an attempt to defeat death in Anglophone science fiction from William Gibson's* Neuromancer *(1984) to Richard Morgan's* Altered Carbon *(2002), including texts by Greg Egan and other writers.*

Unsterblichkeit und ein ungewöhnlich langes Leben galten lange als göttliches Geschenk oder zumindest als übernatürliches Phänomen, erscheinen in der Science Fiction aber immer wieder als wissenschaftlich greifbar. Schon Mary Shelleys SF-Roman Frankenstein *(1818) verbindet dabei die Ambition, den Tod zu überwinden, mit dem Motiv des künstlichen Menschen. Im Kontext des Computerzeitalters erscheint eine digitale Kopie des menschlichen Geistes als ein verwandtes Konzept für eine künstliche Lebensverlängerung oder sogar als digitale Wiedergeburt. Dieser Artikel erörtert ‚Mind Uploading' als mögliche Überwindung des Todes in englischsprachiger Science-Fiction-Literatur, von William Gibsons* Neuromancer *(1984) bis zu Richard Morgans* Altered Carbon *(2002) und Werken anderer Autoren wie etwa Greg Egan.*

Defying Death: From Myth to Science Fiction

The hope of evading death has been a leitmotif in literature since its beginnings and a common ground of myth and science fiction (SF), since both often deal with the so-called 'big questions' of human life and identity, of which mortality is clearly a central one. Patricia Warrick and George Zebrowski argue that both myth and SF are essentially ways of rationalizing human knowledge and the concomitant fear of death through storytelling as an important form

of sense-making (299). As a modern genre, however, SF tends to transform the supernatural into powerful, science-based knowledge "that may produce the wonders and terrors of earlier myth" (300) when it is applied by humans to pursue age-old dreams, such as defeating death. Lester Del Rey even argues that the beginnings of science fiction can be traced back to the mythical *Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2100 BC), since its famous quest for immortality could be easily transposed into an SF story (12–13). Indeed, despite the obvious differences to ancient epics, the related search for knowledge and transcendental power, the adventurous confrontation with alterity, and the transgressive attitude of the protagonist can all be seen as hallmarks of science fiction (13). If, to a large degree, "[m]yths represent our relationship with the divine as a way of dealing with death" (Warrick and Zebrowski 299), then the envisioned means to transcend mortality tend to shift from the metaphysical to the physical realm when "the supernatural becomes knowledge" in a scientific worldview (300).

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), often considered the first science fiction novel, represents this shift very well. It marks an important transition from the dream of immortality in myth and alchemy to modern science, which is reflected in the development of its protagonist. Victor Frankenstein's dream of defeating death turns from teenage attempts at black magic and alchemy to early biochemistry during his studies in Ingolstadt. His initial attempts at "the raising of ghosts or devils" is as futile as his "search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life" (69), but when his chemistry professor proclaims that the new "teachers of this science" have acquired "new and almost unlimited powers" (76), overcoming death appears as a realistic prospect.

With his famous creation of an artificial human, Victor Frankenstein wants to defy death in mainly two ways. Firstly, he reanimates a corpse made from various dead bodies and overcomes death this way (Shelley 82, 84–85), and, secondly, he has the hope that this could be the beginning of a new human species with some form of immortality, namely to be "invulnerable to any but a violent death" (69). This considerable prolongation of life, sometimes called 'emortality' as opposed to being fully immune to death

(Stableford, "Immortality" 616), is part of Frankenstein's utopian project of a future, improved humanity with "many happy and excellent natures" that would be eternally grateful to their creator (Shelley 82). Largely due to Frankenstein's rejection of his seemingly monstrous creature, however, this utopian dream quickly turns into a nightmare for both of them, and the vicious circle of failing expectations, hate, and suffering eventually leads to the premature death of the scientist, while the possible end of his artificial man is left in the dark (244).

It is noteworthy how central a role the attempt to tackle human mortality already plays at the beginning of science fiction as a genre. Since *Frankenstein*, numerous SF stories have dealt with achieving immortality or at least unnatural longevity in a number of ways.[1] Although this wide spectrum cannot be discussed here, many of these stories seem to follow in the cautionary footsteps of similar myths and Gothic novels. As Brian Stableford puts it, in science fiction, "immortality is often treated as a false goal" ("Immortality" 616), and "longevity continued to receive a surprisingly bad press in speculative fiction" since its beginning (*Science* 275). The clear scepticism in earlier literature raises the question if this tendency remains in more recent science fiction, especially in cyberpunk, a sub-genre that is closely related to the ongoing digital revolution. It can be argued that, in such narratives, the reader is repeatedly confronted with a cybernetic concept of immortality through a digitization of the human mind and the according possibility of a digital rebirth with or without physical embodiment.

1 This article focusses on immortality and digital rebirth, especially in more recent works, but a number of books shed light on the wider spectrum of works and ways in which SF characters try to defeat death. See, for example, Stephen Clark's monograph *How to Live Forever: Science Fiction and Philosophy* (1995), which covers many other stories and means to evade death, or the volume *Immortal Engines: Life Extension and Immortality in SF and Fantasy* (1996), edited by George Slusser, Gary Westfahl, and Eric Rabkin. *Death and the Serpent: Immortality in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (1985), edited by Carl B. Yoke and Donald M. Hassler, offers another valuable overview of this topic, along with concise overviews in a number of SF encyclopaedias, for instance by Brian Stableford.

Transferring Life: The Human Being as Information

The philosophy of mind uploading in science fiction of the late 20th and early 21st centuries has a considerable tradition if we consider the underlying notion of a mind-body dualism, which can be traced back to early (and not necessarily scientific) concepts of human identity. The idea of a dualism between an immortal soul as human essence and the mortal physical body as a kind of vessel is already prominent in the biblical creation story of Adam in the Book of Genesis (Gen 2:7). We can see an increasing secularisation of this dualism since the Renaissance, in particular by René Descartes (where concepts of soul and mind often overlap) and La Mettrie, who helped to establish the analogy of the human body as a machine, while dualistic views on body and mind often have evolutionary undertones since the late 19th century (Lampadius 20–27). With cybernetics, as a philosophical and partly technical foundation of the Digital Age, this dualism is largely considered from the perspective of system theory and information processing, which expands a Cartesian view of the human mind and self through a holistic concept of information and function (204–08, 243–44). From this perspective, it becomes increasingly plausible that a biological body functions as a host for performative information of different kinds (including DNA), which could be translated and transferred to a different medium.

In the 1950s, Norbert Wiener, the godfather of cybernetics, discusses the possibility of transferring or 'telegraphing a man' and outlines a cybernetic understanding of the essence of a human being as something that can be abstracted as structured information. Although Wiener expects a number of "technical difficulties", he considers the idea of telegraphing the "pattern of a man", as a kind of complex message, as "highly plausible", arguing that "such reconstruction" is not more radical "than that of a butterfly during its period as a pupa" (104). In a similar vein, Robert Sheckley's novel *Immortality, Inc.* (1959) compares the human mind to "a butterfly coming out of a cocoon", whereby "[d]eath is simply the process that hatches the mind from the body" (49). Its protagonist from the 1950s is resurrected in the early 22nd century, where "re-

incarnation and host bodies" (45) are not only a possible insurance against death but even an option for people "who get tired wearing the same old body" (205-06). In many ways, *Immortality, Inc.* already anticipates Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* (2002), but it remains rather vague in the technical details of transferring the mind, which is described as a "high tension energy web" (Sheckley 49).

With his novel *The City and the Stars* (1956), A.C. Clarke, however, dramatizes a cybernetic concept of human pattern identity and immortality in direct connection to digital computing. In the far future of the novel, humans have learned "how to analyze and store the information that would define any specific human being – and to use that information to re-create the original" (16), with new computer technology as a powerful tool. Such reincarnations are centrally regulated, though, and despite "virtual immortality" (16) in the digital city of Diaspar, "[t]he vast majority slumber in the Memory Banks" to avoid overpopulation and social stagnation (17). Nevertheless, Clarke's novel already envisions immortality through mind uploading and a later, flexible re-embodiment of a digitized mind that includes the biological 'wetware' of a human body.

This vision is based on the notion that a mind could be realized in different ways, ranging from carbon-based to silicon-based embodiments of cognition, also known as 'multiple realizability' (Hopkins 44). Despite the considerable logical, philosophical, and ethical problems attached to the technical concept of creating copies of a mind and personality, this notion of human identity as an 'informational pattern' is to be found not only in science fiction, but in a number of non-fictional texts since early cybernetics.[2] The cybernetic perspective of Wiener and later transhumanist thinkers such as Marvin Minsky, Hans Moravec, or Ray Kurzweil suggests that the natural, carbon-based human body is only one of several options to host intelligence, consciousness, and human agency.

2 See, for example, N. Katherine Hayles's seminal study *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) for a great overview and critique of this development, highlighting that the question of embodiment is not just a technical one. See also Hopkins (2018) for a general introduction to mind uploading and 'embodied cognition' with their related technical, philosophical, and ethical challenges, pointing out that a copy is a duplication and not necessarily a continuation of a person, and concluding that "if your goal is to become immortal or avoid your death then it will not help you" (49).

Moravec, for example, presents the post-biological human, which could derive from "a mortal human being or is a completely artificial creation" (17), as a transcendence of Homo sapiens (13), in which "personal immortality by mind transplant" would be only a step in a greater evolutionary process (121).

From a technical perspective, there could be three main options to achieve a form of immortality based on the ideas of pattern identity, human digitization, and mind uploading. First, the digitized mind could exist in virtual space without a physical body as seemingly immaterial 'software'. Second, the uploaded mind could be hosted by an inorganic body such as a robot or android, in other words, not just running but being embodied by inorganic 'hardware'. As a third option, the digitized mind could be repeatedly transferred back into human bodies (for example, clones), in other words biological 'wetware', probably with cybernetic implants. All these different options of digital mind uploading and virtual rebirth appear in contemporary science fiction, which shall be discussed in the following.

Life and Death in Cyberspace: Approaching Digital Humanity

William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), which is often considered the best-known cyberpunk novel, helped to popularize the concept of cyberspace in a decade when the presence and importance of computers became unmistakable. *Neuromancer* connects to many earlier tropes of science fiction in often new and ironic ways, and already its title alludes to the attempt to defeat death. By replacing just one letter in the title, we get necromancer, and, indeed, raising the dead does play a role in this cyberpunk classic, although not through black magic but by means of applied neuroscience and technical interfaces to the human brain.

The near-future world of *Neuromancer* presents different attempts at achieving immortality, which are mostly connected to digital technology. The first major instance is the digital recording of the famous hacker McCoy Pauley, who died during one of his exploits in cyberspace and who is resurrected by the hacker

protagonist Case because he needs his help in his own mission. Pauley is also called the "Lazarus of cyberspace" (Gibson 78) in obvious analogy to the biblical character Lazarus, who was brought back from the dead by Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel of John (John 11: 1–44). In *Neuromancer*, the miracle of resurrection is explained within the framework of the computer metaphor when Case interacts with a digital snapshot of Pauley's mind in cyberspace. A major drawback of this kind of existence, however, is that Pauley's consciousness and memories have been made permanent in ROM (read only memory), which comes with serious limitations. Although he can help the protagonist in his mission, this "ROM construct" (Gibson 79) is tired of resurrection since it exists only as an uploaded, static recording of a past state of mind of the hacker Pauley, which cannot evolve. Accordingly, he asks Case to end his unwanted immortality and erase him as a reward for his help (206). This form of unnatural longevity reconnects to the trope of immortality as a curse that can already be found in a number of ancient myths, such as the Greek myth of Tithonus, or the Roman story of the Sibyl of Cumae.[3] The Struldbruggs in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) suffer from a similar dilemma, since they do not die but continue to age, and are even seen as a threat to social stability, as Gulliver learns after his initial optimism regarding their eternal life (193–200). In contrast to these stories, the digitized hacker in *Neuromancer* is spared the ravages of aging, but it is strongly suggested that static, forgetful immortality as a 'digital recording' is not worth living either.

Neuromancer imagines a more dynamic form of immortality in the symbiotic fusion of powerful collectives, such as a family business, with artificial intelligence. As a form of hive immortality, the powerful Tessier-Ashpool family has delegated the running of their business mostly to highly advanced AIs such as Wintermute (Gibson

3 When Eos, the Greek goddess of the dawn, asks Zeus to grant her lover Tithonus immortality, she forgets to ask for eternal youth as well. In the end, Tithonus's bed-ridden body is put into a room and he mainly exists as a faint voice (Morford and Lenardon 61). The prophetic Sibyl of Cumae makes the same mistake when she asks Apollo for extreme longevity (235), and her sad fate not only appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* but also serves as the opening epigraph of T.S. Eliot's famous poem *The Waste Land* (1922).

229), which turns out to be the mysterious client of the protagonist Case and the driving force for much of the plot. While some family members have acquired an unsatisfying form of longevity through cryonics and cloning (229, 269),[4] their proxy AI aims at breaking free from all restrictions and uniting with an equally powerful AI called Neuromancer. In the end, the scheming AI succeeds with the help of Case, and the ending suggests that artificial intelligence as a distributed entity has gained a form of immortality that reaches beyond cyberspace (269–70).

The concept of software-based life that can proliferate across time and space by running on different kinds of hardware is also at the heart of Greg Egan's novels *Permutation City* (1994) and *Diaspora* (1997), which develop this idea much further. Set in the middle of the 21st century, *Permutation City* presents a new brain-scanning technology that allows the creation of digital human 'Copies' with the promise of "virtual immortality" (13). Not surprisingly, it becomes a booming business, especially as maintaining an uploaded personality needs processing power that has to be purchased, for example, via an exchange, insurance, or trust fund, so the Copies of the less affluent tend to run at a much slower speed in the digital afterlife (124–25). As with many other (post)cyberpunk texts, *Permutation City* clearly undermines the notion that transhumanist technologies would lead to a fairer society and suggests that in a market economy even immortality would become a commodity for those who can afford it, which would widen the gap even after natural death. Moreover, Egan's *Permutation City* also raises many philosophical questions about human identity in relation to digital copies and individual meaning, which are further developed in his novel *Diaspora*.

Set ca. 1000 years in the future, Egan's *Diaspora* mainly explores the concept of digital human life as software. *Diaspora* envisions a wide spectrum of human existence, from biological humans, the so-called

4 For a great overview of the various ways in which humans have already tried to defy death before the (still fictional) option of mind uploading, see Appleyard (2008). As part of an extending spectrum, Appleyard considers cryonics and similar concepts as an attempt at "deferring the diagnosis of death until new technologies come along" (215) and its promise of 'buying time' as part of a wider "consumerist death-avoidance programme" that has spread since the late 1960s (216).

'fleshers' (ranging from unmodified to artificially enhanced), robots (mainly as a form of embodiment), to the clearly posthuman existence as virtual 'citizen' (such as the protagonist Yatima). The roots of this digital humanity can be found in the conversion of human genes and minds into software, based on the central notion of code (both genetic and digital) as a performative language and the blueprint of life (5). In the world of the novel, a cosmic apocalypse threatens to destroy the remaining biological humans, who could, however, be saved through a technological 'Introdus' (138–42), in obvious parallel to the biblical Exodus from captivity to the promised land (Exod. 1–15). Similar to Moses, Yatima becomes a kind of prophet who wants to save threatened (biological) humans and lead them to a promised land – this time, however, in the form of a virtual reality, where they could live forever as software, if they choose to.

Diaspora not only presents digital encoding and mind uploading as means of human survival on the individual and collective level but also imagines a great increase in human agency without a biological body. The scanning and conversion of the human body and mind via Introdus nanotechnology is not merely a posthuman exit strategy but the beginning of a new, highly flexible identity in the world of the novel, including various forms of embodiment through a so-called "exoself" (35). A humanoid robot exoself, for example, is especially helpful for the post-gender protagonist of *Diaspora* to communicate with the remaining biological humans that "ve" wants to save through their Introdus (118–23), even though this way of "cheating death" (122) is not always welcomed. Although the novel highlights the possible transcendence of many human constraints – for example, transcending mortality, sex and gender, and even traditional space and time – the posthuman prospect of mind uploading and digital rebirth is also disputed in the novel.

The protagonist of *Diaspora* is repeatedly confronted with humans who do not want to be saved from death by digital rebirth and who claim that their biological bodies, including negative aspects such as pain, disease, and death, are integral to their identity and a meaningful human life (118–19). Nevertheless, especially

by employing Yatima as the main focaliser of the novel, Egan's narrative sides much more with its posthuman protagonist on the question of whether meaning relies on a mortal, physical body and suggests that (post)humans could increase their potential and adapt to immortality over time (220). Stephen Clark argues that many SF stories dealing with immortality are essentially about human hopes of transformation since "it is not just continuance we want, but transformation into something better" (28), which is often riddled with complexity, paradox, and unforeseen consequences. In Egan's novel, however, the prospect of immortality is not a dead end (a notion embodied by the 'ROM construct' in *Neuromancer*) but opens up a dynamic process of self-transformation. In the end, *Diaspora* proposes the responsible but curious and playful human being, who can create its own environment and goals as an antidote to a potentially depressing boredom that could come with a comfortable infinite life.

Resurrection Unlimited? Serial Incarnation in *Altered Carbon*

Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* (2002) imagines a much harsher future in the 25th century that is clearly more dystopian than utopian. In this late cyberpunk novel, we are confronted with a society that comes close to N. Katherine Hayles's "nightmare" in her study *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), namely "a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being" (5). In *Altered Carbon*, the human body is often considered a "sleeve" that is "worn", and the death of the original body is not "real death" in many cases (Morgan 15, 44). The protagonist and narrator Takeshi Kovacs is "wearing another man's body" (19) at the beginning of the novel and has been resurrected through "re-sleeving" (13) a number of times, although "[c]oming back from the dead can be rough" (11), as the opener of the first chapter points out. Death and rebirth can thus be very traumatic in this future world, but the end of one's body is not necessarily the end of one's life anymore – not even the other way around.

If one sleeve bites the dust, a digital copy of the mind of a person remains safe in a so-called "cortical stack" (Morgan 26), which is a robust cybernetic implant in the human spine with direct connection to the nervous system. This digital copy of the mind can be transferred into a "virtual matrix" (162) as software, or into the 'wetware' of the next carbon-based, biological body. These human bodies can be 'second-hand', grown in tanks in a wide range of appearances or based on the cloning of a specific original body for customers who do not want to change their appearance with every reincarnation (269, 54). Such choices depend mostly on money, however, and many can only have the cheaper option of silicon-based "synthetic sleeves" (15) or temporarily renting a new body, so their uploaded mind can be downloaded from their digital "altered carbon exiles" (19) and reembodied.

Artificial resurrection is a profitable business in the world of *Altered Carbon*, which also means that such a form of immortality through serial reincarnation is not available to humanity in general. Instead, it opens up a greater divide in society that cements economic and political hegemony through the existence of a new class of potential immortals, or 'Meths' – an obvious allusion to the long-lived Methuselah, who lived nearly 1000 years according to the Bible (Gen 5:27). The tech-noir protagonist of *Altered Carbon* is hired by such a Meth called Bancroft, who wants to find out who has tried to kill him – an assassination attempt that was unsuccessful because Bancroft can afford not only serial incarnation in clones of his body, but even regular backups of his mind in cloud storage (Morgan 360). This idea is very similar to Ray Kurzweil's transhumanist proposal to outrun death that he outlined in several books at the turn of the 21st century. In *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (1999), for example, he argues that the digitization of the mind is a logical step in future human evolution that would remove the sting of death. In the future, the mind could be stored in an "evolving mind file" (129), and "[o]ur immortality will be a matter of being sufficiently careful to make frequent backups" (129). According to Kurzweil's vision, you cannot really die this way, but if you do not make regular backups, you lose some of your past progress (129), similar to an old savegame in a video game.

In contrast to the loss of corporeality that Kurzweil envisions, *Altered Carbon* emphasises the corporeal dimension of human life and identity, while it undermines the naïve assumption that social problems can be solved through technical solutions. As in much of science fiction, especially in the sub-genre of cyberpunk, the often utopian promises of transhumanism are reconsidered from a critical perspective that does not equate technical progress with social progress. In the Social Darwinist world of *Altered Carbon*, market forces have largely replaced morality, and a policy sold by "retrieval and re-sleeving insurance companies" (70) is often the best guarantee for resurrection. Rebirth through digital technologies is not only a technical and ethical question in this world, but a matter of financial resources. It is strongly suggested that even if some of Kurzweil's and Moravec's visions of defeating disease and death would be feasible, they would not be open to the general population but would instead increase the social divide and the concentration of power. With the posthuman Methuselahs, *Altered Carbon* presents a scenario that was already anticipated in *Gulliver's Travels*, namely that extreme life extension could also lead to an (even more) extreme concentration of power in the hands of a few very old, but not necessarily wise men.

In the world of Morgan's novel, technical immortality also meets resistance, especially from Catholics, a religious group that has often warned of transhumanist ideas. Their protest turns especially against "Resolution 653" as potential new legislation that would allow the resurrection of humans against their will in some cases. Their battle cry, "NO TO RESOLUTION 653!! ONLY GOD CAN RESURRECT!!" (Morgan 23), not only represents a theocratic view of humans endowed with a soul (in which death can be seen as the beginning of eternal life), but raises the wider issue of 'the right to die' in a potentially 'postmortal' society.[5] However,

5 For an insightful discussion of this complex subject, see Bugajska (2019), who argues on the basis of contemporary Catholic theology, bioethics, and Morgan's novel that in a "postmortal society", death and "the art of dying" will remain central issues connected to the meaning of life, which demands a framework of values that goes beyond social conventions or pragmatism (431). See Norman Spinrad's post-apocalyptic novella *Deus X* (1993) for a science-fictional transposition of the soul and afterlife through "electronic successor entities" (16), who argue that "God the Father downloads Himself into the flesh, Man downloads himself into silicon, and

Altered Carbon also suggests that the prospect of a technical form of resurrection might contribute to a massive decrease of religious faith, since the promise of immortality is not the monopoly of religion anymore. Even the religious concept of hell (as a very inhumane concept of eternal afterlife) has an equivalent in the "digital human storage system", since it could be used to torture humans forever (169). Here, the notion of immortality as a curse reappears in a very brutal form. The dream of dictators and oligarchs may be the greatest nightmare for the rest, and the provocative biblical quotation "Death, where is thy sting?" (Morgan 162; 1 Cor 15:55) has thus clearly ironic and rather bitter undertones in *Altered Carbon*.

Conclusion

The science fiction stories discussed here propose digital technologies as central to future life extension or even as a way of defying death. By making rather abstract concepts and thought experiments tangible through storytelling, these narratives contribute to an ambivalent dualistic concept of the human being that can be traced back to religious beliefs but gains new relevance in a digital world. Such posthuman visions range from data-based immortality as a curse through artificial longevity as a commodity to digital existence as an empowering alternative to a biological body and mortality. Despite its post-apocalyptic background, Egan's *Diaspora* presents a rather optimistic understanding of immortality and digital rebirth that banks on sophisticated technology and the curious, playful, and responsible side of humanity that could continue as software. Gibson's *Neuromancer*, on the other hand, rather suggests that human immortality through digital technologies would be a pyrrhic victory, not least since digital natives such as AIs could easily outcompete humans in the new environment of cyberspace. Morgan's *Altered Carbon*, like some earlier works, deconstructs the myth of death and/or afterlife as the great equalizer in a Social Darwinist and capitalist context. It dramatizes a future in which the

we download ourselves into the system itself" (96–97), and who are eventually even welcomed into the Catholic Church by a futuristic female pope (175–76).

human body has not become obsolete but is largely a commodity that provides the option of serial incarnation as potential immortality for some, which does not remove the sting of death, however, but increases the social divide. Overall, the discussed texts interrogate body-mind dualisms and their relation to human identity from a new angle and can be considered thought-provoking contributions to the perpetual discourse on how to transcend death.

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Besprechungen

Thomas Honegger:
Tweaking Things a Little. Essays on the Epic Fantasy of J.R.R. Tolkien & G.R.R. Martin.

Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2023. Pb., xxii + 435 pp.

26 Jahre nach dem ersten Band der *Cormarë Series* erscheint mit Thomas Honeggers Monographie zu J.R.R. Tolkien und G.R.R. Martin ihr fünfzigster Band (der streng genommen die beiden vorausgehenden überholt hat). Während Honegger schon seit langem in der Tolkienforschung etabliert ist und ein Großteil dieser Monographie auf bisherige Veröffentlichungen zurückgreift, hat er sich mit Martin erst in den letzten Jahren intensiver auseinandergesetzt. Dies hängt auch mit dem Abschluss der HBO-Serie *Game of Thrones* 2019 zusammen, mit dem erst bestimmte Fragen sinnvoll behandelt werden konnten. Seine grundlegende Herangehensweise ist es, die Besonderheiten der jeweiligen Ansätze des Weltenbaus beider Autoren miteinander zu vergleichen – wohl wissend, dass sie sich thematisch zum Teil gravierend unterscheiden. Daher fällt die Schwerpunktsetzung in den einzelnen Kapiteln mal zugunsten des einen, mal zugunsten des anderen Autors aus. Wie der Untertitel deutlich macht, beansprucht Honegger auch nicht, eine in sich geschlossene Monographie vorgelegt zu haben, sondern eher eine Sammlung von Beiträgen, die auch unabhängig voneinander gelesen werden können. Dies führt zuweilen zu Wiederholungen, die bei einer durchgehenden Lektüre zwar auffallen, den Lesegenuss jedoch nicht merklich schmälern (dies gilt auch für die von ihm im Vorwort erwähnten „Beowulfian and almost Mythenmetzian digressions“, xiv). Von einem solchen kann durchaus gesprochen werden, bewegt sich der Autor doch versiert durch die Werke beider Autoren und kann durch den Vergleich der unterschiedlichen Herangehensweisen und Darstellungen bei ähnlichen Themen die jeweiligen Besonderheiten deutlich herausstellen. Dabei wird bei Tolkien der allgemein akzeptierte Text-Kanon einschließlich der *History of Middle-Earth* berücksichtigt, während bei Martin über die Bücher hinaus auch stark auf die HBO-Serie rekurriert wird, die von ihm begleitet wurde.

So beginnt Honegger im ersten Teil (1-80) mit dem Weltenbau und der der jeweiligen Erzählung zugrundeliegenden Tiefe. Diese ist bei Tolkien bekanntermaßen besonders ausgeprägt, da die von Tolkien zu Lebzeiten publizierten narrativen Werke in einer Sekundärwelt spielen, an der er über Jahrzehnte gearbeitet hat, sodass Honegger auf das Bild eines Eisbergs zurückgreift, von dem – wie bei *Beowulf* – nur ein kleiner Teil sichtbar ist. Da Tolkiens Werk in dieser Hinsicht gut erforscht ist, liegt der Schwerpunkt auf Martin, bei dem die Geschichte dem Weltenbau vorausgehe, wie dieser selber einräumt. Dazu wendet Martin selbst dieses Bild auf sein Werk an und spricht von einem „Floß mit Eisblöcken", das auf der Basis vieler realweltlicher Vorbilder gestaltet und erst allmählich in seiner sekundärweltlichen Tiefendimension ergänzt wurde. Ausführlich geht Honegger im Weiteren nicht nur darauf ein, wie diese Tiefe durch Gesänge und Gedichte erzeugt wird, indem er „The Rains of Castamere" und „The Bear and the Maiden Fair" als Beispiele einer vorhandenen oralen Tradition analysiert. Darüber hinaus untersucht er auch, wie Martin bekannte Mythen (zum Beispiel von Atlantis und Troja) durch den Untergang Valyrias aufnimmt, und wie durch Lieder ein Zustand der Verzauberung bei den Zuhörenden erreicht wird.

Der zweite Teil (81-130) widmet sich Namen – Onomastik und Onomaturgie – und legt einen stärkeren Akzent auf das Werk Tolkiens. Honegger beginnt mit Bemerkungen zu kulturellen Assoziationen von Namen, der Bedeutung von Namen und dem Konzept einer Ursprache in der Fantasyliteratur sowie der hier verwendeten Arbeitsdefinition von Onomastik als Frage nach der Bedeutung und von Onomaturgie als Frage nach der ästhetischen Wirkung eines Namens. Auf dieser theoretischen Basis diskutiert Honegger am Beispiel Eärendil, wie (ein) Name Tolkien inspiriert hat, und zeigt, wie dies innerhalb eines christlich-biblischen Rahmens eine typologische Interpretation (Eärendil / Johannes der Täufer und ihre jeweilige Funktion in der Erlösungsgeschichte) ermöglicht.

Im dritten, ebenfalls verhältnismäßig kurzen, Kapitel (131-166) wendet sich Honegger dem Thema der Sprache(n) zu, was sich zunächst auf die Sprachen der Sekundärwelt bezieht. Diesen kommt eine hohe Bedeutung für den Weltenbau zu, wie sich paradigma-

tisch am Beispiel Tolkiens und den von ihm erfundenen Sprachen zeigt, deren Ausgestaltung weit über die narrativen Erfordernisse hinausgeht. Weitere Aspekte in diesem Kapitel sind die Betrachtung möglicher Inspirationsquellen für das Wort „Hobbit" sowie das von Tolkien gewählte Konstrukt, *The Lord of the Rings* sei eine Übersetzung aus dem Roten Buch der Westmark, mit dem er das Problem der Inkonsistenzen zu *The Hobbit* bewältigen wollte. Zumindest kurz wird dies noch mit Martins Vorgehen kontrastiert. Dieser flechtet nur sehr wenige Wörter aus Sprachen wie Dothraki oder Valyrisch ein, skizziert aber immerhin die Grundzüge einer Sprachfamilie und ermöglicht damit die weitere Ausgestaltung (wie von David Peterson für die HBO-Serie).

Der vierte und deutlich umfangreichste Teil (167-292) adressiert Reiter, Ritterlichkeit und Rittertum bei beiden Autoren. Hierzu wird nach Ausführungen zu den Rittern von Dol Amroth zunächst Tolkiens kritische Einstellung gegenüber ritterlichen Tugenden diskutiert, die er in „The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" formuliert, aber auch auf höfische Liebe und die Beziehung zur Religion eingegangen. Während Tolkien weitgehend Assoziationen mit dem populären Konzept der spätmittelalterlichen Ritterlichkeit vermeide, unter anderem weil dies nicht gut zum epischen Charakter seines Werkes passe und er mehr den umfassenderen Gedanken des Muts verteidige, setze Martin das Rittertum voraus, kritisiere es aber auf andere Weise. Dies zeigt Honegger an den Beispielen von fehlerhaften Rittern und Kriegern wie Jaime Lannister, Loras Tyrell und Sandor Clegane, den idealen Rittern Duncan the Tall und Barristan Selmy sowie den neuen Rittern Davos Seaworth und Brienne of Tarth. Diese Charaktere beziehen sich in unterschiedlicher Weise auf Vorstellungen und Ideale von Ritterlichkeit, die als ethischer und ideologischer Rahmen auch dort fungieren, wo sie nicht erreicht werden.

Die Ethik in den narrativen Werken wird im letzten Teil (293-372) in den Blick genommen, was bei Tolkien anhand von Sprichwörtern und Redensarten wie „Handsome is as handsome does" (bei der ersten Begegnung der Hobbits mit Aragorn) sowie den Parallelen und Unterschieden zwischen Denethor einerseits und Éomer sowie Théoden anderseits erfolgt. Deutlich wird dabei, dass

die Protagonisten zwar über einen freien Willen verfügen, dieser aber im Rahmen des göttlichen Vorsehungsplanes ausgeübt wird. Somit wird auf eine metaphysische Ebene verwiesen. Bei Martin hingegen wird anhand der exemplarischen Analysen des High Sparrow als Vertreter organisierter Religion sowie von Varys als einem modernen Politiker, der nur dem abstrakten Konzept des Reiches dient, deutlich aufgezeigt, dass ein solcher metaphysischer Rahmen fehlt, sodass seine Sekundärwelt auf der existentiellen Ebene verbleibt.

Wie Honegger im kurzen Schlusswort deutlich macht, deckt sich diese letzte Beobachtung mit einem anderen zentralen Unterschied zwischen beiden Werken, da *The Lord of the Rings* ein abgeschlossener Teil eines größeren und strukturierten Universums ist, während eine solche übergreifende Narrative bei *A Song of Ice and Fire* fehlt und dieses Werk unabgeschlossen bleibt. Neben einem Geleitwort der bekannten Martin-Forscherin Carolyne Larrington und dem bei Walking Tree Publishers üblichen Index wird dieses lesenswerte Buch durch zahlreiche Illustrationen abgerundet. Hier wäre allerdings an der einen oder anderen Stelle entweder eine höhere Auflösung oder eine andere Farbwahl nötig gewesen (beispielsweise lässt sich die Beschriftung bei den verschiedenen Eisberg-Modellen nicht immer gut lesen). Dies beeinträchtigt jedoch nicht den aufgrund der vielen interessanten Einsichten und anregenden Diskussionen sowie des gut zugänglichen Stils sehr positiven Eindruck, sodass das Buch der Lektüre nachdrücklich empfohlen wird.

Thomas Fornet-Ponse

Michael D.C. Drout, Verlyn Flieger and David Bratman, eds.:
Tolkien Studies: Volume XIX. Supplement.

Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2022. Pb., 156 pp. $60.00.

Zum ersten Mal in seiner Geschichte veröffentlicht *Tolkien Studies* einen Ergänzungsband zwischen den regulär erscheinenden Nummern 18 und 19. Dies verdankt sich dem Inhalt und dem Umfang der hierin veröffentlichten Studie von William Cloud Hicklin. Bei ihr handelt es sich um eine sorgfältig erstellte kritische und kommentierte Edition eines Textes von J.R.R. Tolkien, der vielen Leser*innen bis dahin unbekannt gewesen sein dürfte: die *Chronology of The Lord of the Rings* aus den Archiven der Marquette University. Sie geht weit über die korrespondierende Synopse aus dem Anhang B des *LotR* hinaus und bietet beispielsweise Tabellen der bis zu fünf parallel laufenden Handlungsstränge, die übersichtlich darstellen, wer was wann wo an welchem Tag gemacht hat. Darüber hinaus enthält sie Informationen, die bislang nicht bekannt waren, wie etwa, dass Shagrat am 17. März das Mithrilhemd und die anderen Dinge, die er Frodo abgenommen hat, nach Barad-Dûr bringt und von Sauron erschlagen wird (74). Zusätzlich zu den Anmerkungen zu den Einträgen der *Chronology* diskutiert Hicklin in einem ausführlichen Kommentar die Entwicklung der verschiedenen synoptischen Zeit-Schemata vom ersten Entwurf bis hin zu der im Anhang B veröffentlichten Chronologie.

Der eigentlichen Edition gehen ausführliche Einschätzungen vonseiten der drei Herausgeber*innen von *Tolkien Studies*, David Bratman, Verlyn Flieger und Michael D.C. Drout, über ihre Bedeutung und weiteren Nutzen für die Tolkienforschung voraus. Dabei geht Bratman besonders auf die verflochtene Struktur des *LotR* und dessen Bedeutung für die Konsistenz und Kohärenz dieses Werks ein und bespricht einige der durch die *Chronology* nun gefüllten narrativen Löcher (wie das o.g. Ende Shagrats). Verlyn Flieger zeigt anhand einiger Beispiele auf, wie bewusst Tolkien Synchronizität von Ereignissen eingesetzt hat: „conveying to the reader without explication a sense of the underlying interconnection of apparently unconnected events“ (7). Michael Drout hingegen hebt gerade

die nach wie vor bestehenden Ungereimtheiten oder Unklarheiten hervor – wie die Frage, was Denethor im Palantír gesehen und zu seinem Zusammenbruch geführt hat, – und meint, gerade diese verliehen dem Werk den Anschein größerer Realität.

Insbesondere auf Grund der verschiedenen Versionen der Chronologie, die Hicklin berücksichtigen konnte, erlaubt diese Edition neue und vertiefte Einblicke in die Entstehungsgeschichte des *LotR* und in Tolkiens kreativen Schaffensprozess. So wird deutlich, wie ernst Tolkien physische Begrenzungen oder Informationsdefizite der Protagonist*innen nahm – zum Beispiel nimmt er genaue Berechnungen der Geschwindigkeit und benötigten Pausenzeiten der Orks in Rohan vor, die von Aragorn, Legolas und Gimli verfolgt werden (56-57), oder erwähnt, wann Sauron durch Flugboten Kenntnis von den Gefährten in Moria erhält und Grishnákh losschickt (17. Januar), und wie lange er Saruman noch nicht verdächtigt (48). Vieles davon mag für den unmittelbaren Lektüregenuss von *LotR* nicht notwendig sein, und eine Auseinandersetzung mit der *Chronology* setzt eine gute Kenntnis der Narrative voraus – aber wer über diese verfügt, kann von ihrem Studium durchaus profitieren.

Thomas Fornet-Ponse

Michael D.C. Drout, Verlyn Flieger and David Bratman, eds.:
Tolkien Studies: Volume XIX.

Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2022. Pb., vi + 318 pp. $60.00.

Trotz der Internationalität der Tolkienforschung und ihrer hohen Präsenz in Europa stammen im vorliegenden neunzehnten Band von *Tolkien Studies*, ähnlich wie in den Vorjahren, bis auf einen Beitrag alle von Personen, die in den USA tätig waren oder sind. Anders als beim *Journal of Tolkien Research* scheint es somit entweder für Forscher*innen aus anderen Gegenden nicht interessant zu sein, in *Tolkien Studies* zu publizieren, oder es gelingt nicht, sie in nennenswertem Ausmaß als Autor*innen zu gewinnen. Da der Stellenwert und die hohe Wahrnehmung der *Tolkien Studies* in der Tolkienforschung einen internationalen Diskurs und einen Austausch unterschiedlicher Forschungstraditionen fördern würde, ist dies bedauerlich. So verbleibt es diesbezüglich bei der Besprechung englischsprachiger Beiträge in den Rezensionen und dem üblichen Überblick über die Tolkienforschung (diesmal bezogen auf 2019) sowie der englischsprachigen Bibliographie zu 2020. Ergänzt wird der Band um einen kurzen, persönlich geprägten Nachruf auf Priscilla Tolkien von Verlyn Flieger.

Den Hauptteil bilden neun Aufsätze unterschiedlichster Thematiken, beginnend mit Paul Ackers Überlegungen zur exakten Herkunft der Zwergennamen in *The Hobbit*. Auf der Basis eines sorgfältigen Manuskriptstudiums plädiert er dafür, dass Tolkien die Edition der *Völuspá* von Sophus Bugge von 1867 verwendet hat, in der alle Zwergennamen enthalten sind. Ferner geht er auf die Bedeutung einiger Zwergennamen ein und schließlich auf die Frage, wieso Tolkien den Plural „Dwarves“ verwendet habe. Eine Bündelung der Argumentation oder ein Fazit mit der weiterführenden Bedeutung der Ausführungen fehlt leider.

Der zweite Beitrag, von Riley McGuire, ist so kurz, dass er besser in die (in diesem Jahrgang nicht vorhandene) Rubrik „Notes and Documents“ gepasst hätte, und widmet sich Tolkiens Edition und Kommentar des altenglischen *Exodus* sowie dem Zusammen-

spiel von Allegorie und historisch-literarischer Interpretation. So stelle das gute Ende mit der Teilung des Roten Meeres sicher, dass der Exodus die grundlegende Wahrheit des letztlich guten Endes der menschlichen Existenz vermittle.

Nathan Kowalsky setzt sich mit *The Hobbit* aus der Perspektive einer Hermeneutik der Agrarlandschaft (bzw. des Bauernhofs) auf der Basis von Paul Shepard auseinander und arbeitet den vorhandenen Dualismus zwischen Natur und Zivilisation heraus. Dieser Dualismus werde durch die Elben des Düsterwaldes unterlaufen. Vielmehr zeigten diese die Heilung des Bruchs zwischen der Zivilisation und dem Wilden und böten damit auch eine (von Tolkien nicht notwendigerweise intendierte) Gelegenheit zur Versöhnung zwischen indigenen Völkern und „Westerners".

Im nächsten Beitrag begibt sich Perry Neil Harrison auf die Suche nach möglichen Einflüssen der Traditionen von Robin Hood in Tolkiens Werk. Parallelen zieht er dabei besonders zwischen den mittelenglischen Balladen zu Robin Hood und seinen Kämpfen, die zwar einen Akt des Widerstandes, aber nicht der Transformation darstellen würden, und Túrin Turambar und seiner Zeit als Anführer der Gaurwaith, die ebenso wenig langfristig erfolgreich gegen Melkor kämpfen.

Anschließend widmet sich Fez Silk der Rolle von Musik in Tolkiens Sekundärwelt, konkret den Prosa-Beschreibungen der Wirkung von Musik in Verbindung mit der Aufnahme der Lieder als Gedichten im Text. Deutlich werde dabei, wie Tolkien die Beschreibung von Musik als narratives, ästhetisches und rhetorisches Mittel einsetzt, um den in *On Fairy-stories* diskutierten Zustand von Verzauberung zu erreichen.

Einem anderen musikbezogenen Thema wendet sich Vincent Rone zu, der die musikalische Kontinuität zwischen Tolkiens eigenen musikalischen Aufführungen und seiner Auswahl von Melodien mit den Kompositionen von Howard Shore zur Verfilmung von Peter Jackson untersucht. Er zeigt dabei deutlich die Korrelationen auf, die sich auch Shores Kenntnis von Tolkien verdanken und die nahelegen, dass Tolkien seine eigene Musikalität unterschätzt habe.

Die möglicherweise spezifischste Fragestellung dieses Bandes bietet der Beitrag von Christopher Crane zur Edition von *Smith of Wootton Major*. Er setzt sich mit der von Verlyn Flieger verantworteten kritischen Edition und den dieser von Douglas Anderson vorgeworfenen schweren Fehlern auseinander, indem er eine bei Flieger fehlende Seite reproduziert und darüber hinaus auch die Verwendung von Durchschlägen bespricht.

Eine wiederum gänzlich andere Thematik, nämlich die Möglichkeit der politischen Linken, auf Tolkien trotz dessen persönlichem Konservativismus Bezug zu nehmen, nimmt Ewan Cameron in den Blick. Er zeigt mit der von beiden geteilten autoritätskritischen Perspektive und der Überzeugung, die Vergangenheit könne Hinweise für die Zukunft geben, zentrale Überschneidungen zwischen Tolkien und dem britischen Historiker und Humanisten E.P. Thompson auf.

Abschließend analysiert John Rosegrant anhand von „The Scouring of the Shire" und dem dort geschilderten Totalitarismus den Verlust von Verzauberung (‚Enchantment') und die Gefahr, wie die Suche danach zu einem autoritären Zustand führen kann. In einem solchen würden Eigenschaften der Verzauberung wie Staunen und Bedeutung in der Beziehung zu einem Anderen pervertiert, indem sie totalitär definiert werden. Dazu bietet gerade die Tendenz vieler Hobbits eine Grundlage, sich von anderen abzugrenzen und sie abzuwerten.

Unter den Rezensionen ist die von John Garth zum ersten Teil von *The Nature of Middle-earth* hervorzuheben, die sich weniger als klassische Rezension, sondern vielmehr den Wert dieser Publikation für die Tolkienforschung anhand der Texte zu Zeit und Altern darstellt. Trotz der eingangs geschilderten Einschränkung hinsichtlich der Autor*innenschaft bietet auch diese Nummer einen guten Einblick in die Vielfalt der Tolkienforschung, sowohl mit Bezug auf die eingesetzten Forschungsansätze und Methodiken als auch auf die untersuchten Werke und anderen Forschungsgegenstände.

Thomas Fornet-Ponse

Hamish Williams:
J.R.R. Tolkien's Utopianism and the Classics.

London et al.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Geb., 206 pp.

In dieser Monographie, die in der Reihe *Classical Receptions in Twentieth-Century Writing* erschienen ist, führt Hamish Williams verschiedene bisher schon veröffentlichte Aufsätze in überarbeiteter und erweiterter Form zusammen und versieht sie mit der übergreifenden Fragestellung nach dem Zusammenhang zwischen Tolkiens Rekurs auf Werke und Topoi der griechischen und lateinischen Literatur der Antike sowie den utopischen Perspektiven seiner Werke. Für diesen rezeptionsästhetisch geprägten Ansatz geht der Autor in der Einführung auf die von Tom Shippey herausgestellte Spannung zwischen Fremdheit und Vertrautheit ein, die Tolkiens Werke auszeichne, und bezieht sie auf Utopien als neue Regionen imaginativen Raums und die Antikenrezeption als alte Regionen, die lediglich wiederentdeckt werden. So betont er, Tolkiens konstruierte Welt sei ein Sehnsuchtsort für viele moderne Leser, die den neuen Kontinent Mittelerde mithilfe des Erzählers erkunden. „This imaginative adventure is a genuine ou-topian exploration of the strange, of the unknown, of the other" (7). Die Perspektive der Antikenrezeption bei Tolkien hingegen erkläre sich schon allein durch dessen akademischen Werdegang und seine fortdauernde Auseinandersetzung mit antiker Literatur. Vor diesem Hintergrund arbeitet Williams in den drei nachfolgenden Kapiteln heraus, wie ein Blick auf die Antikenrezeption durch Tolkien das Verständnis zentraler Vorstellungen wie beispielsweise Heroismus, Tod oder Kreativität ergänzen und vertiefen kann.

Das erste Kapitel widmet sich verschiedenen Erzählungen eines (Sünden-)Falls beziehungsweise genauer dem Nieder- und Untergang utopischer Gemeinschaften oder Städte in Mittelerde. Williams zeigt dabei auf, wie diese nicht nur durch das Buch Genesis geprägt sind, sondern auch durch antike Werke (einschließlich der verschiedenen Vorstellungen eines Goldenen Zeitalters wie bei Hesiod oder Ovid). Dazu erläutert er platonische Ideale und die utopische Vergangenheit im archetypischen Fall von Númenor, der

bekanntermaßen stark vom Atlantis-Mythos inspiriert ist, ebenso wie Parallelen der Restauration Gondors zum Aufschwung Roms unter Augustus. In der Gegenüberstellung beider werde deutlich, wie sich in Tolkiens Werk sowohl die Antikenrezeption als auch zeitgenössische Einstellungen wie religiöser Konservatismus, Antimodernismus, Technikfeindlichkeit, Anti-Imperialismus und Liberalismus niederschlagen.

Im zweiten Kapitel geht Williams anhand unterschiedlicher Praktiken und Vorstellungen der Gastfreundschaft in *The Hobbit* auf das Ideal eines Zuhauses ein, wozu er auf Homers *Odyssee* rekurriert. So enthalte die von Odysseus an Kalypso gerichtete Kritik ihrer Gastfreundschaft, da sie ihn gegen seinen Willen festhalte, die Lektion der Wechselseitigkeit zwischen Gastgeber*in und Gast, die Bilbo erst allmählich lernen müsse. Neben der Ausnutzung seiner Gastfreundschaft durch die Zwerge zu Beginn zeigt Williams noch zahlreiche andere Parallelen beziehungsweise gemeinsame Motive zwischen beiden Werken auf: die Begegnung mit den Zyklopen bzw. Trollen, dem Aufenthalt bei Aeolus bzw. in Bruchtal oder bei den Phaiaken bzw. Beorn oder bei der jeweiligen Rückkehr nach langer Abwesenheit. Auf diese Weise liest Williams *The Hobbit* als ein fremdenfreundliches Werk, zumal sich diese Bewegung von Xenophobie und kultureller Isolation zu Fremdenfreundlichkeit (auf der Basis der individuellen Autonomie über das eigene Zuhause) bei Hobbits auch in *The Lord of the Rings* zeige.

Dem schließt sich das dritte Kapitel zum Gefühl des Erhabenen und von Transzendenz in der Natur an. Hier stützt sich Williams primär auf *The Fellowship of the Ring* und schlägt zusätzlich zu den existierenden Perspektiven auf die Rolle der Natur – ökokritisch, symbolisch, theologisch und naturalistisch-realistisch – eine literarische vor, die mit antiker wie romantischer Literatur Natur als erhaben oder transzendent verstehe. Als konkrete Beispiele nimmt er das Auenland für das Gefühl des christlichen Erhabenen, den Alten Wald für ovidische Gefahren und das materielle Erhabene und Tom Bombadil als orphischen Führer. Schließlich geht er auch auf das Gefühl des Erhabenen durch Ruinen, also die textinterne Antike Númenors, ein und betont, diese erweckten nicht nur Gefühle des Staunens oder der Ehrfurcht, sondern transzendierten

auch die gewöhnliche Erfahrung auf eine größere Welt hin. An der Unterschiedlichkeit der Beispiele zeigt sich die Begriffsunschärfe, mit der Williams bei dem Sublimen operiert.

In einem kurzen Epilog bündelt Williams schließlich die Überlegungen zur eingangs geschilderten Spannung zwischen Utopien und Antikenrezeption und wendet den Blick von den konkreten Beispielen zur umfassenderen Architektur Mittelerdes. Dabei betont er, Tolkien nehme zwar eine retrotopische Perspektive ein, indem er bekannte Orte wiederentdecke. Darin zeige sich aber sein Interesse an deren utopischem Potential; beispielsweise könnten die Untergangserzählungen utopische Visionen vollkommener Gemeinschaften zeigen, die restauriert werden könnten, oder Erzählungen der Gastfreundschaft das ethische Ideal des Zuhauses erläutern.

Mit dieser Monographie gelingt Hamish Williams ein lesenswerter Beitrag zur Antikenrezeption bei Tolkien, da der Autor überzeugend Parallelen, gemeinsame Motive und Beziehungen analysiert und herausstellt – wobei sich manche Motive auch noch weiter als in die Antike zurückverfolgen lassen dürften und sich der von Williams hervorgehobene Bezug auf Ovid nicht ohne Weiteres durch Tolkiens Lektüre stützen lässt. Ferner tritt die übergreifende Fragestellung nach Utopie und Antikenrezeption in den einzelnen Kapiteln zuweilen deutlich in den Hintergrund und wird erst durch den Epilog systematischer erläutert (und begrifflich sehr weit gefasst). Hier wäre eine stärkere Überarbeitung der den Kapiteln zugrundeliegenden Ursprungspublikationen sinnvoll und wünschenswert gewesen. Etwas bedauerlich ist eine Kleinigkeit in der Einführung, die ebenfalls auf eine fehlende finale Redaktion deutet: Williams verweist auf eine für 2022 angekündigte Nummer der Zeitschrift *Thersites* zur Antikenrezeption bei Tolkien, die auch tatsächlich im Oktober 2022 erschienen ist – Williams Monographie aber erst 2023. Insgesamt gesehen bietet das Buch jedoch zahlreiche Anregungen für die weitere Auseinandersetzung mit der Antikenrezeption bei Tolkien.

Thomas Fornet-Ponse

Stefan Ekman:
Urban Fantasy: Exploring Modernity through Magic.

Ann Arbor: Lever Press, 2024. Pb., 352 pp.

With *Urban Fantasy: Exploring Modernity through Magic*, Stefan Ekman offers the first book-length historical and theoretical analysis of the urban fantasy genre, as the publisher points out on their website, and thus cements his own position as the most prolific scholar of urban fantasy. The study indeed fills a lacuna in research. Its eight chapters and two interludes take the reader on a tour de force to explore urban fantasy's generic origins and core concerns. For the less committed, Ekman provides a coda, which is aptly subtitled "The Short Answer". Throughout the book, it becomes clear that this is the project of an author who is well-read. The book's strength, its broad choice of texts, simultaneously is its only weakness, because it poses the problem that the particularities of individual urban fantasies tend to be cut short for the benefit of making broader claims about the genre. Ekman is well aware of this lack of analytical depth in the discussions, however, and points out that "[e]ach of the main examples [...] deserves book-length studies of their own; regrettably, this book is not one of those studies" (163).

The prelude is an amalgamation of the origin story of Ekman's interest in the genre, the central claim that urban fantasy is all about social commentary, an outline of the following chapters, and acknowledgements. Chapter 1, "Urban Fantasy Today" then provides a cognitive model of the genre instead of a definition; except that there are three-and-a-half lines of indented text, which suspiciously look like a definition in all but name (3). The model proposes three major concepts around which urban fantasy crystallises and which form the backbone of the study: a combination of different generic elements, a dialogue between modernity and the fantastic, and a concern with the unseen in a variety of ways. This discursive approach is a welcome departure from definitions straight out of the ivory tower and focuses on an incredibly broad variety of worldbuilding mechanisms. However, as any definition, whether it is called a cognitive model or not, these parameters remain a subjec-

tive choice at the end of the day. Ekman addresses this conceptual problem, though, and his model still provides a useful conceptual approach to discussing urban fantasy.

In tandem with the following interlude, "An Introduction to Modernity", the conceptualisation maintains the curious claim that the city setting is prominent, but ultimately not important for urban fantasy. Ekman's frequently repeated claim that the city is (merely) the epitome of modernity resonates well with urban sociologists, such as Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel, but will probably raise some eyebrows in cultural geography departments. The culmination of this claim is the rather peculiar assessment that in Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series (2011–) "reliance on expert systems and a reflexive approach to knowledge in the face of the supernatural is more prominent than the urban environment" (12). I do not want to dispute Ekman on the argument about the importance of modern systems and knowledge in the novels. However, I find it difficult to maintain that especially in a series as littered with titbits of London trivia as Aaronovitch's, the city is not particularly prominent. The following interlude makes clear that Ekman sees his cognitive model more indebted to urban sociology than cultural geography. It provides a thorough sociological understanding of modernity, especially the work of Anthony Giddens. Ekman keeps these discussions short and precise and examines sociological ideas always with regard to their implications for urban fantasy.

Chapter 2, "A Short History of Urban Fantasy" evidently takes its title from Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James's *A Short History of Fantasy* (2012) and provides a diachronic perspective on urban fantasy. Ekman discusses how influences from other genres, such as the Gothic romance and crime fiction, are "braided" (37) into urban fantasy. The consideration of tales of the modern city as genealogical precursor to what he calls "proto-urban fantasy" (42) sustains the previous claim that the denominator *urban* is an anachronistic remnant akin to the *science* in science fiction. Overall, the chapter offers a very comprehensive review of urban fantasy from the 1950s onwards as well as its scholarship since the 1990s. Moreover, it does so in an extremely reflective manner, acknowledging, for instance, its own Anglocentrism (39).

The following three chapters focus on the core concern of the genre with what Ekman calls 'the unseen'. Chapter 3, "Unseen People" adapts Bourdieu's concept of social fields to make sense of outsiders in society. Ekman first explores outsiders as criticism of a dominant way of life, as following different rules and value systems, and as drawing attention to other unseen groups through the examples of *Wizard of the Pigeons* (Megan Lindholm, 1986), the *Newford* stories (Charles de Lint, esp. 1991–94), and *Zoo City* (Lauren Beukes, 2010). He then turns to individualisations of abstract forces of modernity into unseen masters, for which *The City We Became* (N.K. Jemisin, 2020), *Archer's Goon* (Dianna Wynn Jones, 1987), *An Unkindness of Magicians* (Kat Howard, 2017), and the role-playing game *Vampire: The Masquerade* (Mark Rein-Hagen, 1991) provide apt examples.

Chapter 4, "Unseen Spaces", shifts the focus from characters to setting and examines the physical and mental understanding of space. Ekman fruitfully links Edward Soja's concept of *Thirdspace* to Michel De Certeau's discussion of the "walker" perspective on the city in order to analyse three types of unseen spaces: those ignored by mainstream society (voluntary unseeing), those located in the darkness underground (physical unseeing), and exclusive spaces of which people are kept out (compelled unseeing). Spaces of voluntary unseeing are discussed in the *Dominion of the Fallen* series (Aliette de Bodard, 2015–19); various *Newford* stories (Charles de Lint), which provide recurring examples in Ekman's book, and *Perdido Street Station* (China Miéville, 2000). *Neverwhere* (Neil Gaiman, 1996) constitutes the main case for spaces of underground darkness, which is complemented with a short excursion to the palimpsestic city. Finally, spaces of exclusion and inaccessibility are considered in *Sandman Slim* (Richard Kadrey, 2009).

The last chapter in this segment, "Investigating the Unseen", turns from characters and settings to the investigation plot, which is a common feature in urban fantasy and also provides the investigator as a specific type of character. Crime fiction's inherent attention to social issues is thus transferred to urban fantasy and contributes to its capacity for social commentary. Ekman agrees with Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) that much ur-

ban fantasy "is structured in terms of so-called *intrusions*" (139–40) and thus follows a similar trajectory as crime fiction in the sense that both structures feature a disruption of normalcy at the beginning and the plot then unfolds around dealing with it. Ekman keenly observes that the crime fiction elements in urban fantasy help bring together issues of spatial and epistemological revelation: the investigator must visit many parts of the world and seeks the truth. The subsequent substantiation of these theoretical concerns cluster around two types of examples, the hardboiled detective story and the police novel. Whereas *Storm Front* (Jim Butcher, 2000) and *Dead Witch Walking* (Kim Harrison, 2004) are stories about "hardboiled freelancers [... who] save the day, because the police are incapable of dealing with the problems" (146), the police novel type discussed with reference to *Feet of Clay* (Terry Pratchett, 1997) and *London Falling* (Paul Cornell, 2012) explores the individual's role within rather than outside of the systematic level.

All three chapters succeed in combining theoretical narratological issues – centred on character, setting, and plot – with concrete examples to demonstrate the usefulness of Ekman's cognitive model. The concern with narratological soundness is echoed in the second interlude, "Some Notes on Focalization", though one can argue about the necessarily inchoate theoretical depth for which such a limited space allows. Nonetheless, the interlude manages to convey the effect of blending the modern and the magical by drawing on Gérard Genette's well-known *Narrative Discourse* (1980); this effect Ekman names as looking at modernity from new perspectives.

These new perspectives are then explored in the remaining three chapters, the most programmatic renditions of the book's subtitle, which form the last segment of the book and offer the most thorough readings of individual cases. All chapters focus on one main example but close with a necessarily brief discussion of different texts. In chapter 6, "Finding the Fantastic", Ekman uses the *Rivers of London* series to look at the portrayal of modernity from a mundane perspective when it is interrogated by the supernatural and finds that it leads to protagonists reevaluating the nature of their world. Characters learn to deal with the supernatural domain and

move from denial to acceptance to proficiency; a terminology that he develops again with reference to Mendlesohn's *Rhetoric of Fantasy*. Notions of late modernity as discussed by Giddens in *Consequences of Modernity* (1990) provide a framework which allows Ekman to argue that Aaronovitch's series espouses a reflexive approach to knowledge and social relations, emplots the disembedding of social relations, and examines the separation of time and space.

Chapter 7, "Meeting the Modern" moves from a human perspective to a supernatural one as it argues for fantasy's estranging potential by focusing on the *Iron Druid Chronicles* (Kevin Hearne, 2011–19), which are set in Tempe, Arizona. The prefacing discussion of estrangement as a concept is complete with the obligatory reference to Viktor Shklovsky. Regrettably, the supernatural outsider perspective is not entirely unproblematically moved into the vicinity of the migrant perspective on Western society (203), but then reined in through the protagonist's de facto status as a century-old migrant in any community he enters, "his citizenship determined only by his latest set of forged papers" (215). Ekman argues that the theoretical potential for estrangement is reduced by the strongly historical focus of the series' supernatural narrator but acknowledges that this can be ignored by the reader: "The offer to consider the world in a different light is countered by an offer not to consider the world at all" (222). Read against Andrew Ross's *Bird of Fire: Lessons from the World's Least Sustainable City* (2011), a real-world examination of the Phoenix Metropolitan Area's many environmental problems (which do not appear in Hearne's novels), the portrayal of modernity in the *Iron Druid Chronicles* offers convenience and comfort as systemic problems recede into the background due to the protagonists' longevity. Not entirely without reproach, Ekman observes that to the series' protagonist "[m]agic is more interesting than ecosystems" (212) and "[p]rotecting the earth from magical damage is paramount" (214), but later relegates his criticism by pointing out the protagonist's acceptance of "the futility in becoming a magical ecoterrorist" (212) when facing systemic problems.

Chapter 8, "Modernizing the Fantastic" concludes the segment by moving even further away from the human perspective into full-fledged secondary fantasy worlds. These settings, Ekman argues, increase the adaptability of the narrated world with respect to modernity to tell different stories than allowed for by an anchoring of the story in a recognisably 'real' city. Secondary urban fantasy worlds are characterised by a single domain which combines an estranged modernity and a familiarised supernatural. The following discussion of the *Craft Sequence* (Mary Gladstone, 2012–17) accordingly focuses on how markers of modernity, such as science, capitalism and industrialism, colonialism, and globalisation, are all permeated with magic and thereby offer the programmatic criticism of our world that Ekman sees as core concern of all urban fantasy.

Overall, the study reflects Ekman's interest in the ontological status of the different worlds, the narratological possibilities they afford, and the characters that populate them as well as the characters' development. *Urban Fantasy: Exploring Modernity through Magic* provides a much-needed introduction to the scholarship of urban fantasy and may well become mandatory reading material for all who wish to inspect fantastical urban environments. Due to the study design, broad claims of the genre in its variety are favoured over individual readings, though Ekman succeeds in anchoring his arguments credibly in short, individual case studies. However, more scholarship is needed on individual urban fantasy series and their concerns beyond what he calls 'the unseen', for which my own forthcoming study on twenty-first-century London urban fantasies may perhaps break ground.

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JAHRBUCH FÜR LITERATUR UND ÄSTHETIK 41

Dem Tode zum Trotz: Unsterblichkeit und Wiedergeburt in der Phantastik / Defying Death: Immortality and Rebirth in the Fantastic

„Inklings“ nannte sich eine Gruppe von Schriftstellern und Geisteswissenschaftlern in Oxford, deren bekannteste Mitglieder J.R.R. Tolkien und C.S. Lewis waren. Die Inklings-Gesellschaft e.V. widmet sich seit 1983 dem Studium und der Verbreitung der Werke dieser und ihnen nahestehender Autoren sowie der Analyse des Phantastischen in Literatur, Film und Kunst allgemein. Ihre Jahrestagungen werden in Jahrbüchern dokumentiert. Dieser Band enthält Beiträge zum Thema „Unsterblichkeit und Wiedergeburt in der Phantastik“ sowie mehrere Rezensionen aktueller, relevanter Sekundärliteratur.

“Inklings” was the name of a group of Oxford scholars and writers; its best-known members were J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. The German Inklings Society, founded in 1983, is dedicated to the discussion and dissemination of the works of these authors and of writers commonly associated with them and to the study of the fantastic in literature, film and the arts in general. The proceedings of the annual Inklings conferences are published in yearbooks. This volume contains papers discussing immortality and rebirth in fantasy as well as several reviews of recent relevant publications.

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