HANS RUDOLF VELTEN,
JOSEPH IMORDE (EDS.)

FANTASY AESTHETICS

VISUALIZING MYTH AND MIDDLE AGES, 1880–2020

[transcript] THE MIDDLE AGES AND POPULAR CULTURE

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Hans Rudolf Velten, Joseph Imorde (eds.)
Fantasy Aesthetics

The Middle Ages and Popular Culture | Volume 4

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Editorial

Our present imaginations and visualizations of the Middle Ages are not at all consistent. They emerge from varying and shifting social and cultural conditions and appear within specific frames of reception. Thus, scientific discourses are grounded on historical records and are disseminated by official institutions such as universities, academies, scientific publishers, and museums. They stand in sharp contrast to the heterogeneous field of popular discourses and practices including Historical or Fantasy Novels, Graphic Novels, magazines, movies, TV-series, roleplaying/LARP, or medieval(istic) festivals. However, public response to, and social impact of these popular forms of Medievalism generally prevail over academic discourse.

Therefore, the systematic inclusion of popular medievalism in Medieval Studies seems paramount for at least two reasons. The first concerns the liability of popular discourses for ideological malpractice: political messages of high impact are often associated with popular appropriations of medieval themes and topics, e.g. the adoption of fictional characters as historical figures and vice versa. The second reason involves popular medievalism's contributions to cultural self-conception: adaptations and transformations of medieval myths, figures or artifacts lend themselves to alternative concepts of reality and/or identity, thus gaining significance as critical and aesthetical commentary on present conditions.

Analyzing popular discourses of the Middle Ages and making them critically accessible not only enables Medieval Studies to engage with contemporary political issues, but also encourages closer collaboration with other disciplines. The academic book series **The Middle Ages and Popular Culture** provides a platform for studies on popular medievalism of all eras.

The series is edited by Robert Schöller and Hans Rudolf Velten (managerial responsibility), Michael Dallapiazza, Judith Klinger and Matthias Däumer.

Hans Rudolf Velten is a professor of Medieval German literature and language at Universität Siegen. He is currently principal investigator in the research program (SFB) "Transformationen des Populären" and has widely published in the fields of vernacular medieval literature and cultural theory. His research interests are in literature and culture of the late middle ages and early modern period, historical anthropology, theater history of the 15th and 16th centuries, and medievalism.

Joseph Imorde was a professor of art history at Universität Siegen until 2021 and is a principal investigator in the research program (SFB) "Transformationen des Populären". Since 2022 he has been a professor of art history and vice president at the Kunsthochschule Weißensee in Berlin. His research centers on the historiography of art history, archaeology, anthropology, and ethnography.

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Fantasy Aesthetics

Visualizing Myth and Middle Ages, 1880-2020

Assisted by Lukas Schrage

[transcript]

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Preface

This volume originates from the research projects *Popular Middle Ages. Narratives and Inventories of Fantasy Literature* (Velten) and *'Cheap Images'. The Popularization of Art Historical Knowledge in the Early 20th Century* (Imorde) in the framework of the Collaborative Research Center 1472 »Transformations of the Popular« at the University of Siegen. It is the result of an interdisciplinary conference entitled *Myth and Middle Ages: Paradigms of Pictorial Fantasy Aesthetics / Mythen und Mittelalter: Paradigmen einer Bildästhetik der Fantasy (1880–2020)*, which took place from March 13 to 15, 2023 in the Aula of the Weißensee School of Art in Berlin. We would like to thank all the speakers and contributors to this volume for their willingness to engage with the rather unusual topic and contribute an essay.

For help and support with the preparation in print we thank most of all scientific collaborator Lukas Schrage who organized everything in the best of all manners. During the organization of the conference, we had precious help by student assistants Charlotte Braun, Nalan Dincel and Tobias Holzhauer. Project collaborator Dr. Theresa Specht gave constant and relevant advice. Further, we would like to thank Luisa Bott from transcript for supervising the publication, the Collaborative Research Centre 1472 and its coordinator Dr. Raphaela Knipp for their organizational and financial support.

Siegen & Berlin, March 2024

Hans Rudolf Velten & Joseph Imorde

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Introduction: Fantasy between Text and Image

Neomedieval Patterns of Visualization

Hans Rudolf Velten

1. Literature and Visible Presentation

In the last chapter J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Vol. 1 of the *Lord of the Rings*), the city of Minas Tirith is described in Frodo's vision on the summit of Amon Hen as follows:

> Then turning south again he beheld Minas Tirith. Far away it seemed. and beautiful: white-walled, many-towered, proud and fair upon its mountain-seat; its battlements glittered with steel, and its turrets were bright with many banners. (Tolkien 1999a, 527)

In our mind's eye, we see a white, walled city right on the mountain in the distance, with countless banners fluttering on its towers: its appearance, location and decoration immediately remind us of a medieval fortress. But for a more detailed description we have to wait until Gandalf and Pippin reach Minas Tirith in the first chapter of *The Return of the King*:

> For the fashion of Minas Tirith was such that it was built on seven levels, each delved into the hill, and about each was set a wall, and in each wall was a gate. But the gates were not set in a line: the Great Gate in the City Wall was at the east point of the circuit, but the next faced half south, and the third half north, and so to and fro upwards. (…) For partly in the primeval shaping of the hill, partly by the mighty craft and labour of old, there stood up from the rear of the wide court behind the Gate a towering bastion of stone, its edge sharp as a ship-keel facing east. Up it rose, even to the level of the topmost circle, and there was crowned by a battlement; so that those in the Citadel might, like mariners in a mountainous ship, look from its peak sheer down upon the Gate seven hundred feet below. The entrance to the Citadel also looked eastward, but was delved in the heart of the rock; thence a long lamp-lit slope ran up to the seventh gate. Thus men reached at last the High Court, and the Place of the Fountain before the feet of the White Tower:

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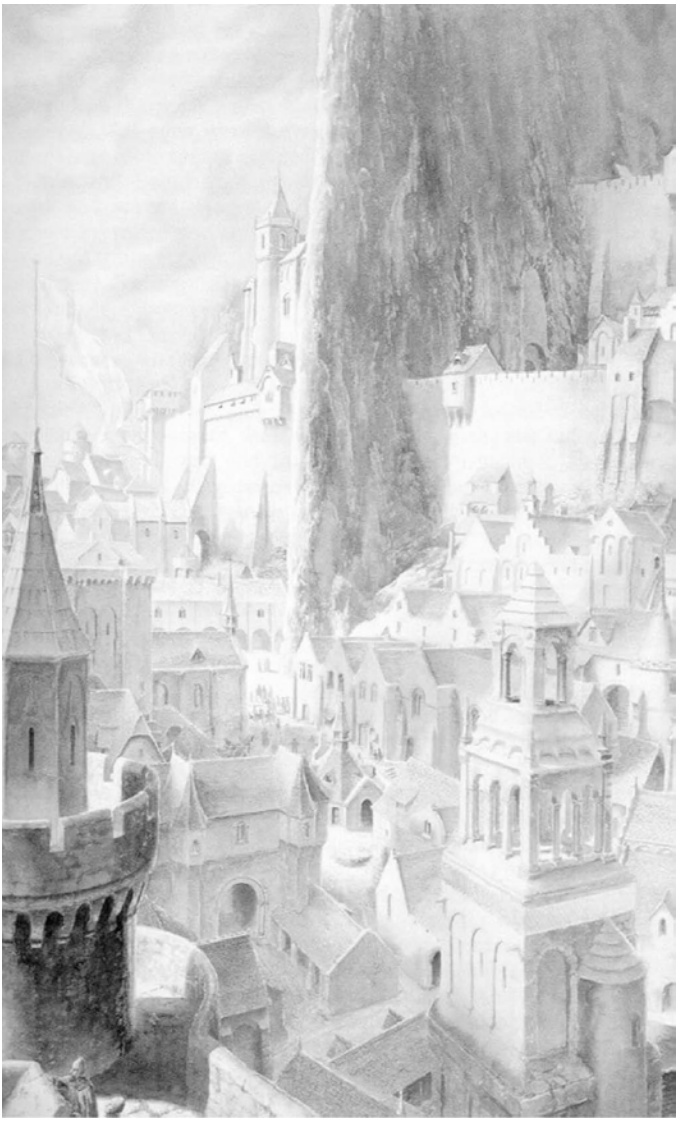
tall and shapely, fifty fathoms from its base to the pinnacle, where the banner of the Stewards floated a thousand feet above the plain. (Tolkien 1999b, 11–12)

Fig. 1: Minas Tirith by Alan Lee (detail, © Alan Lee)



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Here we learn more about the construction and appearance of the city; there are, of course, a number of fantastical elements, most notably the dizzying height of the citadel and its shape of a ship's keel. But even here we can imagine a medieval city with a castle using lexical markers such as gate, city wall, arched tunnel, bastion, citadel, high court, white tower, banner of the stewards. It is this last reference to the lords of the city, the stewards, that shows us that we are somehow dealing with power relations that we know from the European Middle Ages. This becomes even clearer in the third, short section, when Pippin enters the great hall:

> Pippin looked into a great hall. It was lit by deep windows in the wide aisles at either side, beyond the rows of tall pillars that upheld the roof. Monoliths of black marble, they rose to great capitals carved in many strange figures of beasts and leaves; and far above in shadow the wide vaulting gleamed with dull gold, inset with flowing traceries of many colours. No hangings nor storied webs, nor any things of woven stuff or of wood, were to be seen in that long solemn hall; but between the pillars there stood a silent company of tall images graven in cold stone. (Tolkien 1999b, 14–15)

Fig. 2: Minas Tirith by John Howe (detail, © John Howe)

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The cathedral and monastery architecture of the Gothic Middle Ages immediately comes to mind here; a medieval, sacred interior is also evoked by what is not present but is mentioned, i.e. wall hangings or tapestries, objects made of fabric and wood. At the other end of the hall stands a throne in the form of a crowned helmet.

Every reader of *The Lord of the Rings* can imagine Minas Tirith quite well from this description, but remains alone with these ideas. However, since the illustrations by Alan Lee, John Howe and the film by Peter Jackson, images of the city have become popular and imprinted in our collective memory, so that we continue to associate them with the city; their strong impact is certainly due to their own visual aesthetics, but also to the accuracy with which they have shaped Tolkien's narrative details.

Tolkien himself was somewhat skeptical and suspicious of the pictorial representation of his story: in 1967 he wrote to Unwin, his publisher: »I myself am not at all anxious for The Lord of the Rings to be illustrated by anybody whether a genius or not.« (Scull/Hammond 2006, Vol.1: 692).[1] And this despite the fact that *The Hobbit* had of course already been published with his own illustrations and the paperback with a cover by Pauline Baynes, who also illustrated *Farmer Giles of Ham*. Of course, he had already made sketches for his stories, but did not want to publish them at first. He justified his refusal to illustrate them in *On Fairy Stories* as follows:

> In human art, Fantasy is best left to words, to true literature. In painting, for instance, the visible presentation of the fantastic image is technically too easy; the hand tends to outrun the mind, even to overthrow it… However good in themselves, illustrations do little good to fairy stories. The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a visible presentation and true literature is that it imposes one visible form. Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive. It is at once more universal and more poignantly particular. (Tolkien 1983: 159).

Tolkien makes an important distinction here, which separates literature as a linguistic-rhetorical presentation from visual presentation: the latter »imposes one visible form« – it is the exclusivity and finality with which an illustration fixes a literary text

1 For Tolkien, the »illustration of a book does not and should not have an aesthetic life of its own« (Tankard 2019: 31); he stressed »faithfulness« and »fidelity« to his original text. To Pauline Baynes he spoke of »decorations« and »a series of pictures in the margins« (ibid.: 31). Tolkien estimated the illustrations by Mary Fairburn most, calling them »splendid«. »They are better pictures in themselves and also show far more attention to the text than any that have yet been submitted to me« (cfr. Tolkien's correspondence with M. Fairburn, Tolkien Estate, quoted after Tankard 2019: 24). He even accepted to produce a first illustrated edition with Fairburn's illustrations: »After seeing your specimens I am beginning to change my mind, and I think that an illustrated edition might be a good thing.« (Tolkien, Letter to Fairburn, quoted after Tankard: 33).

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to pictoriality. We then have hardly any more possibilities to imagine things – Minas Tirith – differently than they are shown to us by the visual media. Illustrations thus limit a previously pictorially unlimited form, the literary narrative. And Tolkien doubts whether 'illustration' is actually capable of representing 'art', i.e. literature, correctly and completely.

I put this example at the beginning of this volume to make a few things clear that all of the chapters are concerned with. First of all, in Tolkien as in Epic Fantasy in general, the visual aesthetics of fantasy apparently already draw heavily on medieval pre-images, props and narrative forms and use these patterns extensively, admittedly without drawing historical boundaries to other eras such as antiquity, the Migration Period or the Renaissance. The Middle Ages are voracious in this respect and simply incorporate the neighboring eras (Velten 2018: 17). Fantasy as a genre thrives on the neomedieval visualization of castles and walled cities, of kings, fairies and heroes on horseback, their fights and battles as well as their weapons and thing symbols, some of which take on an iconic character. How does this affect illustrations, images, maps and book design, also with regard to the development of the Fantasy genre? What results can be observed in intermedia transfer? Is the neomedieval groundwork of the texts reinforced by visual aesthetics?

Secondly, these images Tolkien creates are closely linked to their linguistic semantics, when a walled castle on a cliff, with towers, banners and a 'palas'-like hall is mentioned, in which a Steward with royal pretensions sits on the throne. The question here is how the illustration of (in this case: medieval) political, cultural, and social structures and events interprets the semantics inherent in the narrative, whether and in what way it adopts or deletes, adapts or transforms them. This is because the visual field is almost always based on semantic structures that give meaning to the text. The nature of these relationships and how the visual aesthetic changes the semantics of Fantasy in the respective genres will have to be better explored.

It is highly interesting, thirdly, to explore the relationship between different forms of visualizitation and the literary text: the illustrations and other paratexts of Fantasy (Genette 1997), such as the images on book covers, the sometimes very elaborate but often also very imprecise maps of the worlds created, or even the ornamental elements, however inconspicuous they may be? Do they limit it, as Tolkien believed, and if not, what do they achieve? What part do they play in the popularity of Fantasy works in books, films and games? How commercial are they? Are there references to images of the Middle Ages that were already popularized in the 19th century?

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2. Fantasy Aesthetic(s): Some Perspectives

Today, Fantasy is one of the most popular intermedia entertainment genres worldwide. Its growing attention in recent decades is not only reflected in charts and rankings, but also in the form of popular cultural events such as Peter Jackson's film adaptation of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or the highly successful HBO series *Game of Thrones*, based on the novel series by George R.R. Martin.

Among the many reasons contributing to this popularity, the visualization of heroic and villainous characters, relevant spaces and locations, battles and fights in the visual media of Fantasy (like book covers and illustrations, maps, posters and display material, films and serials, images on websites etc.) is highly significant. However, this visualization has hardly been seen by scholars of the genre so far, and it has also been studied only selectively (exceptions are the works of Tolkien, cf. Hammond/Scull 2018, Alexander 2016). Yet it is not only the intratextual heroes, settings, and motifs of individual novels that exhibit iconic quality; it is also mythic archetypes of characters, things, buildings, and landscapes that together constitute the imagery of Fantasy.

This visual aesthetic has iconographic antecedents in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is part of the much larger and comprehensive fantastic art, which has been an important current in European iconography since Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel (Holländer 1980; Brittnacher 2013). In this regard, Fantasy imagery refers to literary motifs, materials, and sources from the mythologies of the Middle Ages and antiquity: the songs of the Old Norse Edda, the Celtic tales about King Arthur and his Round Table, the Germanic heroic epics, the Finnish Kalevala. Here we find patterns and models that have entered the genre (which, in sensu strictu, only begins with Tolkien) via various routes from their aesthetic absorption in Romanticism and 19th-century historicism: Dragons and monsters, dwarves and elves, wizards, demons and witches, fairies and mermaids, kings and princesses, chivalrously armed heroes and their dark antagonists, mysterious and animate, often pseudo-religious objects and weapons, talking animals, giants, trolls, and other monstra (Kowalski 2020). They, together with neomedieval spaces (steep cathedral walls, high towers, moats and city walls, ruins of castles, temples and monasteries, dark forests and battle panoramas), often garishly lit and featuring bold color combinations, form a large part of the reservoir of Fantasy iconography. This strangeness of nature and environment, based on the invalidity of natural laws and a historical and cultural distance that makes the manifestations of images, figures, and spaces components of »other worlds«, can be seen as the basis for this iconography. Together with its topographical localization on maps, it is part of the »fantastic neomedievalism« that Umberto Eco had already described in 1986. Tolkien's maps, for example, which were designed analogously to medieval maps of places and ways, show a complete mythopoetic Fantasy world able to stimulate pictures and illustrations (Klinger 2011; Bunting/

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Currie 2020). In general, »significant elements of Tolkien's mythology« appeared simultaneously with the texts also in pictorial form, as recent studies of his illustrations have revealed (Hammond/Scull 2018).

That has been very generally speaking so far, because if we look at the cover designs, maps and illustrations from seventy years of Fantasy literature, there are of course other iconographic sources than medieval ones (Doyle/Grove 2019). For example, Sword and Sorcery Fantasy makes greater use of warrior figures from ancient and pre-medieval times along the lines of Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian*, often depicting them in their naked physicality, but also hybridizing them with monster figures or images of the present day. The context in which this genre has its roots, the American pulp magazines, also influenced its open and expansive fantastic imagery (Luckhurst et al. 2018; Haining 2020).

The aim of the volume is to expand and differentiate these observations, to relate them to the iconographic tradition of the fantastic, and thus to better explore and understand the visual aesthetics of Fantasy. Hence, in turn, their part in the popularity of the genre – for example, through commercial strategies of image staging – should become more visible, as well as their influence on the respective text should be examined more closely. The volume is designed to be interdisciplinary in order to initiate exchange between approaches in literary studies, art history, and book studies. The subject of the conference will consist of the production of visualizations of global Fantasy in its diverse media manifestations: Book illustrations and covers (novel and graphic novel), image design in comics, visual figurations in film and television series, the various visualizations in role-playing, video and computer games of Fantasy.

The questions which guide this volume on pictorial Fantasy patterns and their role in popularizing Fantasy media are closely linked to some of the assumptions and theses of the DFG- funded Collaborative Research Centre 1472 »Transformations of the Popular« in Siegen, which uses the term »second-order popularization« to refer to the exhibition of popularity in visual and textual strategies geared towards media communication and commercial success (Werber et al. 2023). This also means that Fantasy visualizations in graphic novels, films, series and games strongly reinforce the popularity of certain Fantasy books and stories, as can be seen, for example, in the popularization of Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* through the comic of the same name and the video game. We keep this second-order popularization in mind when we ask ourselves in the individual analyses what the media change or media combination means for the respective work and its visual aesthetics.

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3. Contributions

The contributions of this volume treat the following topics:

1. Images of Fantasy literature: cover design, illustrations, book decorations and maps in Fantasy novels and series of different epochs and authors. Tolkien himself had illustrated his novels and decorated them with »kaleidoscopic patterns«. The global reception of *The Lord of the Rings* called for renowned illustrators who worked out numerous editions: John Howe, Alan Lee, Frank Frazetta, Boris Vallejo are only some of the most important among them (Auger 2008, Alexander 2016). Some of them have issued own Fantasy drawing and painting techniques (Vallejo 1987; Howe 2007).

2. Fantastic iconography in the 19th and early 20th centuries: Victorian painting, for example, of the Pre-Raphaelites with their decidedly medieval references, the medieval book art of someone like William Morris, the works of the Arts & Crafts movement, the Ars Fantastica of Surrealism (cf. Lottes 1984, Biemer 2011, Prettejohn 2012, Suriano 2005, Goodwin 2015). Here, the focus is primarily on the archetypes of medieval reception in nineteenth-century medievalism, but also on other patterns of fantastic iconography (e.g., in W.R. Lethaby, cf. Boos 2020) constructing the visual aesthetics of Fantasy. The goal is to demonstrate adaptations of such iconographic patterns in material design, coloration, and decoration in Fantasy. Similarly, the inclusion of medieval archetypes in pulp magazines and dime novels of the early 20th century, such as the illustrations in magazines like *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harper's Bazaar, McClure's, Argosy, Eerie, Prince Valiant*, etc. (Earle 2009, Kowalski 2020) is worth to be examined.

3. Fantasy imagery can also be seen in graphic novels, movies, series, and games. Since the release of the major Fantasy films and television series after 2000, which once again popularize Tolkien's or Martin's popular novels, Fantasy iconography is inevitably changing as a result of the shift to the visual medium. The question which this intermedial expansion entails may be clarified on the basis of individual analyses of graphic novels, films, series, and games (such as Dungeons & Dragons or The Witcher) (see Packard 2009, Dolle-Weinkauff 2010, Harvey 2013, and Bärtle 2017).

The volume starts with **Mirja Beck**'s survey entitled »Aesthetics without Pictures? – (Literary) Book Illustration between High and Low Culture«, in which she examines the history of book illustrations and their negative assessment in high culture since the 19th century. In doing so, she provides an overview of the numerous voices of literary criticism, whose objections to the illustration of books are organized in three categories: 1) criticism against an increasing quantity of illustrations; 2) arguments for adult pictureless literature as distinguished compared to illustrated children's books, and 3) the fear of undermining readers' imagination through the use of imagery. As an exception, Fantasy literature is identified as an »imaginative genre« less affected by the highbrow prohibition of images – instead,

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the addition of certain images can contribute to marking Fantasy books as objects of value.

In »The Visual Realization of Fantastic Worlds on Book Covers«, **Melanie Korte** shares her experiences as a seasoned illustrator of Fantasy literature. In doing so, she highlights the visual strategies employed with landscape and character images that have become increasingly important in the face of online marketing and contemporary publishing strategies. Korte identifies the visual role models that emerge from international bestsellers and established genre conventions as important influences for the conceptualization of illustrations – aiming to create a world that is both immediately recognizable as medieval and ahistorical, and thereby in explicit contrast to the genre of historical fiction. The author underlines, finally, the changing role of the illustrator as a creative professional in today's book and media markets, restricted by more and more incisive publisher's decisions.

The next chapter starts with the central topic of representational display in Fantasy: how should elves being illustrated? In »Beautiful and Sublime – and Never mind the Pointed Ears. Visualizing the Elves throughout the centuries«, **Thomas Honegger** in his thoroughly worked contribution investigates the heterogeneous representations and motif traditions of elves in literature from the Early Middle Ages to Shakespeare's » A Midsummer Night's Dream« up to the 19th century – and identifies the sources Tolkien productively adapted for the conception of his »Arda« cosmos, transforming Tolkien's literary legacy and its adaptations. Here, elves are gradually distinguished from diminutive Victorian-era »flower-fairies« and become visible as the luminous, ageless beings that Alan Lee's and John Howe's illustrations and finally Peter Jackson's »The Lord of the Rings« film trilogy has rendered archetypes of contemporary Fantasy media. This popular imagination of the elf becomes, however, visible as transformative still in the latest TV adaption of Tolkien's works, Amazon's »The Rings of Power«.

Starting also with Tolkien's works, **Judith Klinger** examines in an exhaustive essay entitled »Visualizing the Never-Seen: Models of Time, Space, and History in Fantasy Cartography« secondary world maps archetypal for the genre, using the examples of Tolkien's »Middle Earth«, Lewis's »Narnia« and Martin's »Westeros«. The chapter initially describes the emergence of the 1980 general map of Middle-earth from different previous maps to acquire a multilayered character, and shows pertinent interrelations to historical (medieval) patterns of mapping in Tolkien and Lewis. In contrast, the Westeros maps are subject to continuous serialization and transformation, being constantly reworked in the HBO series and reflecting on cartographic modernisms. While the primary function of maps is to offer guidance into worlds only explorable through narration, they can strategically highlight or withhold information to the reader. Here, the various examples illustrate a complex interplay of visual strategies, hybrid historicizations, and markers of seriality, thus

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becoming recognizable as liminal zones in which Fantasy-specific incoherences between incompatible models of space and time are displayed.

The following two chapters address the paratextual framework of Fantasy novels and series in book trade and marketing. In her chapter »The Fantasy Novel as Commodity. The Aesthetics of a Neomedieval Book Design«, **Theresa Specht** explores the visual strategies relevant to the design of Fantasy books. Here, book covers fluctuate between genre marker, unique feature and vehicle of information, thereby becoming recognizable as intersections of semiotic systems. On the basis of influential genre examples from Martin's »A Song of Ice and Fire« to Markus Heitz' »Dwarves« series, Specht shows the development of book design in neomedieval Fantasy literature. Further, she identifies the genre's »neomedieval aesthetic« characterized by distinct and reproducible features which also relate to the content and world building of the plot. As a result of increasingly refined marketing strategies and interchangeable inventories, the Fantasy novel is thus rendered a commodity.

In »Medievalist Aesthetics and Marketing Strategies: Some Thoughts on Cover Design from the 1980s to the Present«, **Miriam Strieder** outlines the history of the Fantasy genre's visual appropriation of the Middle Ages, starting at the major aesthetic impulses generated by Tolkien and his medievalist influences in Art nouveau. An important turning point for the genre's formation and its book covers becomes visible in the enduring »medievalist hype« since the 1980s, starting with the neomedieval cover designs of Fred Marcellino, which has since broadened common knowledge about the Middle Ages readily available within popular culture. Based on Gillian Bradshaw's trilogy »Down the Long Wind«, whose cover designs of English and German editions are compared, Strieder shows not only a shift to art nouveau and other medievalist patterns and signs – due to a younger target audience –, but also identifies an increasing number of references to the period's architecture, art and literature.

The subsequent chapters aim to show in different ways how fantastic and Fantasy media in contemporary popular culture resume and adapt medieval myths and narratives, paradigms and ideas. It starts with an investigation into the perseverance of medievalist artistic patterns of the Victorian period in Fantasy illustration and design. In »William Morris's Medievalist Visual Aesthetics and its Persistence in Fantasy«, **Hans Rudolf Velten** identifies the Victorian artist's medievalist style as a defining factor for the artistic development of Fantasy literature and its most influential cornerstones. Velten identifies three categories of Morris's specific style (ornamentation, typography and image design) as decisive elements, which continue to inform the staging of Fantasy books as richly decorated works of art and objects of value. Morris thus becomes the initiator of the genre's »(neo)medieval ethos formula«, which is already visible in a number of adaptive works as early as 1920. Conclusively, the essay offers an abbreviated survey of examples showing the adaption and transformation of Morris's and Victorian design patterns.

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In »Unicorns in Contemporary Popular Culture«, **Joseph Imorde** examines the historical development of the unicorn motif from mythical creature of the Middle Ages to present-day merchandising products and screen presence in which it acquires fantastical magic. In reference to the ambivalent concept of »cuteness« theorized by Sianne Ngai, the unicorn becomes visible as canvas for various semantic properties, revealing an ambiguity that has long been inscribed in the dual nature of the creature, existing at the threshold of fact and fiction for centuries – as symbol of chastity and promiscuity, Christ and devil alike. Recalling some early family letters of Sigmund Freud on shared domestic idyll by filling living spaces with emotions, as well as Martin Heidegger's reflections on dwelling, Imorde identifies the contemporary popularity of the unicorn in media primarily in its escapist potential, representing a safeguarded magical world absent of any danger.

In »Fantasy Medievalism. On the Aesthetic of the Mythical«, **Racha Kirakosian** compares the HBO series »Game of Thrones« to the medieval narratives »Herzog Ernst« and »Mélusine« in order to underline and discuss common motifs: The character of Daeneyrs Targaryen thus becomes visible in her bestial femininity (Mélusine tradition), while the show's exploration of the country of Dorne shows striking resemblance to orientalist imaginations of the East such as staged in the Herzog Ernst Epic. Drawing on Valentin Groebner's thesis of medieval 'post-productions' in the image machines of film and tourism, as well as on Ernst Cassirer's concept of »mythical thinking«, Kirakosian develops an »aesthetics of the mythical« characterized by its synthesizing approach to elements of the historical and the imaginary. She argues that this aesthetic applies to the Fantasy genre and its highly reproduceable visual worlds, while its predecessors already become visible in the medieval source material.

In »Reception of Medieval Literature in Science Fiction Series«, **Isabella Managò** examines three exemplary episodes of influential sci-fi series (»Doctor Who«, »Star Trek«, »Legends of Tomorrow«) in order to determine the specific appropriation of the Middle Ages, its related myths and literature by the genre. The central question is how the three Science Fiction episodes discuss the relationship between literature and history and reflect their own fictional status inside popular knowledge.

While their common denominators can be identified in elements of serial storytelling, here archetypes of medieval literature are also subject to critical and humorous reflection and are thereby adapted to the viewing conventions of modern audiences. At the pop-cultural threshold of historical and Fantasy elements, Managò further discusses the tension arising from an interaction of fictionality and (asserted) authenticity in both medieval and modern media.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: Detail from Alan Lee: Minas Tirith. Illustration for Book V, Chapter I, Minas Tirith, The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. London/New York 1991, available online: https://arthur.io/art/alan-lee/minas-tirith [accessed: 1 March 2024]. Copyright Alan Lee.

Fig. 2: John Howe: Minas Tirith. 2002, available online: https://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/File:John_Howe_-_Minas_Tirith.jpg [accessed: 1 March 2024]. Copyright John Howe.

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Aesthetics without Pictures?

(Literary) Book Illustration between High and Low Culture

Mirja Beck

In Rafik Schami's fairy tale *Der Wunderkasten* (1990)[1] an old man from Damascus tells children a story that they can follow by viewing pictures in a peep box. Over time, the pictures become worn out, and the man fills the missing spots with his own collages of colourful advertisements. However, the illustrations no longer match the story, so gradually both the images and the text become unappealing to the children, and the old man loses his audience. After two years, the storyteller returns and shows the children his magic box once again. The children's enthusiasm is reignited – although the box now contains no pictures at all. Without the incongruous pictures, the children use their own imagination, which supposedly means that they now experience the story more intensely (cf. Schami 1990). The moral of the story seems to be that no pictures are better than bad pictures. The reader or listener's own productive imagination triumphs.

This question of the illustration of literary texts was especially topical in the nineteenth century. The French writer Stéphane Mallarmé stated definitively: »Je suis pour – aucune illustration. Tout ce qu'évoque un livre devant se passer dans l'esprit du lecteur« (Mallarmé 2003 [1898]: 668).[2] Everything that a book evokes – as in Schami's fairy tale – must take place in the reader's head. This desire for an ideal literary reception without accompanying pictures is in contrast to – or perhaps the result of – the widespread assumption that the vast majority of readers lack the ability to visualize what they are reading, and that this explains the great popularity of book illustrations (see for example du Maurier 1890: 349f.). At the end of the nineteenth century, then, the illustrated book was already seen as a popular form of literature which targeted broad audiences and had a problematic relationship with high culture.

The title of this article is a reference to the central concept of this edited volume: Pictorial Aesthetics. Rather than investigating the specific aesthetics of Fantasy illustrations, I examine the historical assessment of images in literary texts and its

1 An English version was edited in 2018, titled *The Storyteller of Damascus* (cf. Schami 2018).

2 As quoted in Miller 1992: 67.

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impact on the evaluation of those documents. I will begin by outlining the popularity of literary book illustrations from the nineteenth century, and will then consider individual judgements about illustrations from Europe and North America. These can be divided into the categories of quantity, infantilization, and fantasy/imagination.

1. Illustration as Fashion

Thanks to the development of modern methods of image reproduction, illustrations became omnipresent in the nineteenth century. Books and magazines were decorated with wood engravings and later with photomechanical reproductions, based on the technology available and the evident appeal of the images. Wood engravings and halftones, produced by relief printing, made it possible to combine image and text on one page. They also made the process of image distribution faster and cheaper. In 1850 the famous German encyclopedia by J. M. Meyer, *Das große Conversations-Lexikon für die gebildeten Stände* (Great Encyclopedia for the Educated Classes), noted: »Illustrated editions have become, amazingly and almost unavoidably, […] commonplace fashion« (vol. 16: 450; quoted in Plünnecke 1940: 2).[3] This »unavoidably« implicitly refers to the huge appeal pictures were thought to have and to the powerlessness of texts in comparison. The term »commonplace fashion« (*Allerwelts-Mode*) is clearly pejorative, since it not only implies short-term, anti-classic popularity, but also a random and undiscriminating audience. Other authors similarly appeared to hope that this trend for illustration would be fleeting. The US journalist Charles T. Congdon prophesied: »It may as well be said plainly that this system of illustration is a fashion, and cannot last« (Congdon 1884: 489). Yet the illustrations seem to have been in demand among the general populace, and the »rage for pictures« (ibid.: 488) also extended to writers. Illustrations, or the illustrators themselves, were seen as critical for the (commercial) success of literature (ibid.). The popularity of illustrations among the general public and the economic influence of illustrations on the literary scene provoked critical voices, which will be discussed in more detail later. One of the reactions to this trend was the refined design of books by William Morris and his associates, emphasizing their distance from the huge print runs of cheaply produced popular books (cf. Döring 1996: 33).

Before and after the First World War, especially in the 1920s, the illustrated artist's book displaced the popular illustrated book as a more exclusive art object, created by recognized artists (cf. ibid.: 35). The rise of cinema also seems to have partially replaced the need for book illustrations. In his 1940 dissertation on the *Grundformen der Illustrationen* (Basic Forms of Illustration), Wilhelm Plünnecke

3 This and all following translations from the German, M.B.

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noted that illustrations had nearly disappeared, particularly from »books of high literary quality«, and now only appeared on the covers (Plünnecke 1940: 44). The crucial element here is the absence of illustrations in books of »high literary quality«, indicating the presumed incompatibility between illustrations and ›highbrow‹ literature.

As an additional cost factor, the quantity of illustrations used was, and still is, also influenced by the economic situation. At the beginning of the 1960s, the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* contributed to an increase in the production of illustrated books, lasting until around 1972 (Bosch-Abele 1996: 133). One series worth mentioning in this context is Klett-Cotta's *Hobbit Presse*, which was initially illustrated by Heinz Edelmann. It differs from other illustrated publications in that all the pictures were placed before the text, at least in the early editions. Susanne Bosch-Abele suggests that this may have been intended to counter the argument that direct juxtaposition of text and image excessively influenced the reader's imagination – a frequently cited criticism of literary illustrations (ibid.: 140, 142).

In the 1990s the illustrated book was upgraded to the status of collector's item. This was, however, primarily in the form of special editions of old and classic literature, generally purchased as gifts or collectibles. This form seemed to be attractive not just because of the established popularity of the works in question, but also because illustrators could benefit from the author's recognized literary status.[4] The combination of newly published literature and illustration, on the other hand, seems to have been less marketable in recent times (cf. Visel 1996: 184). In 1996 Jürgen Döring wrote: »The widely distributed, popular and nonetheless high-quality illustrated book seems to have been consigned to history«, not least because of other visual media (Döring 1996: 36). The conflict between popularity and quality continued to resonate in the 1990s.

Today book illustrations seem to be becoming more popular again. In 2021, the news website tagesschau.de ran the title: »Trend towards illustrations: Books are becoming more and more beautiful« (Hoh 2021). The picture accompanying the article is the elaborately illustrated German luxury edition of the *Lord of the Rings*, with around thirty illustrations by the author (Tolkien 2021). Book illustrations, however, still seem to be largely restricted to editions of the classics. The article quotes Kat Menschik, probably today's best-known German illustrator, who has also noticed this trend. Ten or fifteen years ago, she was told that »no one needs illustrations for

4 We can assume that this reflects a trend that increased after 1950, the »reversal of the burden of proof« (see the research programme of CRC 1472 Transformations of the Popular: Döring et al. 2021: 7). Classics have to justify themselves if they are not also popular. A »popcultural ›remaking‹ or ›remodelling‹« (ibid.: 8), in this case an illustrated special edition, can help canonized classics to attract new attention.

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adults« (Hoh 2021). According to Menschik, one reason for the high level of investment in book design and illustration is the lower cost of printing. She also suggests that higher-priced illustrated books are financially attractive for the industry (Hoh 2021) – the 2021 edition of the *Lord of the Rings* costs 88 euros.

Criticisms of the illustration of literature are mainly based on the idea that the illustrator's input will lead to misinterpretations of the author's intentions, or a disagreeable divergence between the reader's own interpretation of the text and that of the illustrator. Today's prevailing views on the opposition between pictures and texts were already in evidence at the end of the nineteenth century. The denigration of ›harmful‹ images seems to arise from the following factors: quantity, infantilization, and the loss or endangering of fantasy and imagination. The loss of fantasy in particular will be discussed in more detail in the context of Fantasy literature.

2. *Quantity*: Pictures en masse

When we consider the historical evaluation of book illustrations – this goes for both literary works and non-fiction – it becomes clear that what various late-nineteenth-century critics perceived as a particular danger for the general populace was the sheer number of supposedly inferior pictures. In his essay with the telling title *Over-Illustration* (1884), quoted above, Congdon criticized contemporary book design. He argued that instead of offering illustrations with an explanatory function (which he favoured), the publications of his time were more concerned with increasing the book's typographical elegance and bibliographical value. According to Congdon, reading should be an intellectual process and not a source of entertainment. Yet, the vast majority of readers, in his view, actually wanted to be entertained by the pictures: »Those who like a plenty of pictures do not much care to read« (Congdon 1884: 490). The abundance of pictures now available was criticized as massification. Congdon had this to say about single-sheet coloured lithographs: »Chromo-lithography was carried to such an extent that at last the popular stomach revolted. The same fate awaits over-illustrated, tawdry, and bright-looking books. People will come back to good plain letterpress, to quiet binding, and to mere frontispieces, with a portrait or so to gratify a reasonable curiosity« (Congdon 1884: 489). The perceived proliferation of pictures is described here as something genuinely popular, using the metaphor of voracious appetite. Congdon was not opposed to pictures in general – a picture as a frontispiece was acceptable – but to their excessive proliferation. The German art scholar Bruno Meyer also lamented the quantity of illustrations in books, speaking of »vast masses of utterly insignificant illustrative additions« (Meyer 1901: 154) and of the »rampant growth […] of illustrated literature« (ibid.). Meyer concluded: »Illustration has degenerated into meaninglessness, and the only reason for illustration is to have pictures in the text« (ibid.).

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Overall, the critical public only accepted what it saw as high-quality illustrations. This is reflected in a quote attributed to the British illustrator Lynton Lamb: »Illustrations can only be justified if they add to the book something that literature cannot encompass« (cf. Behrendt 1988: 35; Bland 1958: 16). In contrast to the work of art, book illustration is diminished in value because of its status as a made-to-order artisanal product, which is supposedly dependent on the literary work and involves no independent creativity. The mass replication of the illustrations further diminishes their status. A double devaluation takes place: the illustration itself is perceived as inferior to ›pure art‹, while the ordinary, mediocre illustration diminishes the text – or the book as a whole – from the perspective of high culture.

The quotations above offer early evidence of a concern that would be expressed repeatedly in the twentieth century, the fear of a supposed flood of pictures. »From the perspective of the notion of a ›flood of pictures‹, images appear as a quantity that must be kept under control by qualitative means to prevent any harmful effects« (Ruchatz 2012: 13). Critics warned against this flood, always referring back to the classical book – which was actually reproduced in vast quantities itself (cf. ibid.). Meanwhile, there are hints here that the literary elite feared it might lose its interpretive authority. Karl Pawek expressed this in exaggerated form in 1963: »One would prefer to have few people thinking more than to have everyone seeing everything!« (Pawek 1963: 17). The undesirable, supposedly populist popularity of pictures is particularly apparent in the example of the *Bild* newspaper, which was originally intended to contain only pictures and their captions. Thomas Hecken (1997: 87) compares this to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which has very few pictures: »We can read this difference as one of event vs. background, sensational and emotional vs. serious and respectable, but also as one of absolute market leadership vs. relatively low circulation. Pictures continue to be associated with the negative values of superficiality and emotion-mongering, but (tellingly) this proves popular nonetheless.«

In his text about the ›pictorial turn‹, which he sees as taking place at the end of the twentieth century, W. J. T. Mitchell writes: »This anxiety, this need to defend ›our speech‹ against ›the visual‹, is, I want to suggest, a sure sign that a pictorial turn really is taking place« (Mitchell 1992: 89). This fear of the impact of pictures on language and this resistance towards the widespread popularity of pictures can already be detected in the late nineteenth century.

3. *Infantilization*: the Immature Audience

The attraction of pictures (in comparison to texts) is associated with assumptions about the immaturity of the general public, and thus with an infantilization of the illustrated book in general. The view that it is easier to communicate with the ›common people‹ visually rather than intellectually most likely goes back to the days of

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general illiteracy, but seems to have been widespread in Western cultural history for centuries.[5] In 1895, the well-known German art historian Wilhelm Bode was certain that the general public »would much rather look at pictures than read essays or poems« (Bode 1895: 33). Critics understood the childish, »innocent pleasure that cheap pictures give« (Congdon 1884: 491), but argued for the need to counteract this »superficial inclination« (Bode 1895: 33), for example (in Bode's case) with the refined and tasteful design of the art magazine *Pan*. So the naïve book-buying public, for want of any faculty of judgement of its own, had to be protected from itself. This assessment of the general populace and its relationship of ›guilty pleasure‹ towards pictures seems to have stood the test of time: even in 1940 Plünnecke still stated about the illustrations on book covers: »This reveals the reader's subterranean receptivity to illustration – even and especially in serious literature. Evidently the book cover, that is, the visual interpretation or the symbolic encapsulation of the literary work, has more power to seize the reader's attention than the name of the author« (Plünnecke 1940: 44).

At the same time, critics deplored the commercialization of illustration by publishing houses. They were, it was argued, motivated by purely mercantile interests, and used pictures solely as a lure for unsophisticated readers (cf. Vodoz 2020: 53). Many sources emphasize the alleged exploitation of immature customers for publishers' own economic interests. The real evil, it was felt, was the adaptation of the publications to the presumed needs of a broader audience: the publishers, according to their critics, were trying »to always deliver something new, something more colourful and more tasteless […] – most of them admittedly in good faith, thanks to the miseducation that this illustration industry has already caused« (Bode 1899: 186). The publishers, it was argued, »are more likely to find buyers for a book, magazine or newspaper with pictures than if they try to attract and retain them with mere texts – and they act on this principle. Because they want to do as much business as possible!« (Meyer 1901: 154). The preference for illustrations is perceived as the distinction between childish, immature and uneducated readers and the emancipated and educated part of the population. Concrete evidence of the harm caused by this *Bilderlust* (desire for or pleasure in pictures) was the discontinuation of the pictureless magazine *Unterhaltungen am häuslichen Herd*. Joachim Schöberl quotes the editors in the

5 There was, however, a position that was decidedly critical of language and verbalism within (early) debates on educational philosophy. Hans-Christoph Koller (2020: 273) shows this with reference to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi: »Like Rousseau, he considered the world of books as a danger, because it put words in the place of natural moral feeling or intuition (*innere Anschauung*). The task of moral education was therefore to ensure that moral teachings on virtue were preceded by ›living feelings‹ (*belebte Gefühle*) […]. Thus Pestalozzi contrasts the verbal naming of moral matters with the direct sensing – or the prelinguistic ›feeling‹ – of moral relations. This immediacy seems to be threatened by words, as ›dangerous signs‹.«

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final issue in 1864: »Given the extraordinary boom in illustrated magazines in recent years, it is becoming harder every day for a publication ›without pictures‹ to win and retain the favour of the public. The masses no longer wish to read, they only want something nice to look at« (Schöberl 1996: 235). Schöberl himself constructs a parallel to the cultural critics of his time, who condemned television consumption as pure *Schaulust* (visual pleasure or voyeurism).

In a not particularly serious but nonetheless revealing online guide on book illustration, published in 2021, a clear distinction is still made: »If you are considering book illustrations for your book or e-book, you should think about whether your target group actually needs illustrations. If you are writing for children who cannot yet read themselves, pictures are important. For older children, a small number of well-placed images help to break up the text. Adolescents and adults could be distracted by pictures in novels« (Sevecke-Pohlen 2021). What is striking here is the ongoing assumption that adult readers are immature and must be protected from distractions.

The main genre in which illustrations are found today is books for children and young people. Here we can trace a link to Fantasy fiction, which has its roots in child and youth literature and is subject to the widespread preconception that non-realistic genres are generally meant for children and teens (cf. Ewers 2013: 256). The question is: how does the infantilization of the Fantasy genre relate to the infantilization of illustrations?

4. *Fantasy*: Endangering the Power of the Imagination

While pictures in children's books are seen as fostering the imagination, since their audience is not yet able to read, this no longer seems to be the case for adults. Since the dawn of modernity, imagination has been synonymous with creativity and closely linked to the cult of genius and the autonomous subject (cf. e.g. Reckwitz 2012). One topos in the criticism of illustrated literary texts is the loss of the imaginative faculties, which should ideally be stimulated by the written narrative. Congdon wrote: »A scene, an action, an event vividly described by the writer ought of itself to make a picture in the mind of the reader, and each ought to make his own. […] But here the illustrator steps in and makes originality of impression impossible. He takes the work out of the hands of the writer, and dictates to the reader what he shall see« (Congdon 1884: 486f.). However, producing »pictures in the mind« requires a certain ability. The book illustrator George du Maurier noted, fairly neutrally:

> The greater number, I fancy, do not possess this gift, and it is for their greater happiness that the illustrator exists and plies his trade. To have the authors [*sic*] con-

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> ceptions adequately embodied for them in a concrete form is a boon, an enhancement of their pleasure. Their greatest pleasure of all, of course, is to see it all acted on the stage. In this way the story unfolds itself to them without any effort on their part; nothin' is left to the imagination, which they may not possess, or, possessing, may not care to exert. (Du Maurier 1890: 350)

Thus, the capacity to imagine, or the conscious exercise and activation of the imagination, is not something ascribed to the vast majority of society. In du Maurier's view illustration, which presents a kind of interpretation of the text, allows effortless reading. Meyer also argued – in much more pessimistic tones than du Maurier – that the public had no interest in reading that required exertion: »It can be assumed that the sort of so-called ›readers‹ at whom such ›beautification‹ (›*Verschönerierungen*‹) of the book design is targeted will not strain their pretty eyes with the reading of texts« (Meyer 1901: 156). The publisher Ferdinand Avenarius made similar observations in his essay *Über das Illustrieren* (On Illustration, 1883). This increasingly widespread lack of imagination fitted into a pessimistic diagnosis of contemporary culture: »Our ›age of clarity‹, which would love to embroider the sign ›towel‹ on every towel, needs illustration simply as a crutch for its paralysed imagination, enabling it to at least limp towards an opinion« (Avenarius 1883: 84). Thus, the growth of illustration was perceived as a vicious circle.

The art historian Anton Kisa confirmed this ›decline of the imagination‹ – supposedly caused by the mass proliferation of pictures – and quoted the French writer Anatole France (1844–1924), who had argued against the theatre. Theatre, France claimed, freed the audience »from the need to imagine anything. This is why it satisfies the majority. This is why it only has moderate appeal for dreamy and thoughtful minds. Such minds love ideas only for the sake of the continuation they themselves give them, and because of the euphonious echo they awaken in them« (Kisa 1905: 495). In contrast, when »uneducated minds« read texts without pictures they usually only experience »a smaller and weaker enjoyment« (ibid.). Similar views would be expressed shortly after this about the early cinema,[6] but Kisa was concerned with the slides used in popular lectures:

> Instead of reading a book at home, one spends the evening sitting in a comfortable chair among beautiful ladies, seeing and being seen, and enjoying the obligatory slides, which demand no thought but have now become the main attraction. The

6 Peter Sloterdijk, in his text *Weltanschauungsessayistik und Zeitdiagnostik* (Essays on worldviews and diagnoses of the times) draws attention to Frank Thiess's *Das Gesicht des Jahrhunderts* (The face of the century, 1923). Thiess criticizes, according to Sloterdijk (1995: 314), the »unproductive fantasy« that is becoming prevalent as the result of cinema, in contrast to the coproductivity that occurs during reading. Film, according to Thiess, is »the expropriation of the imagination and the enthronement of receptive laziness«.

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> lecturer knows perfectly well that hardly anyone is listening to him, and that it is the selection and sequence of the pictures that counts. A correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* claims that of a dozen lectures he attended in his clubs in one season, only two were without slides, and only these deserved to be ›described as good‹. (ibid.: 498)

Although Kisa was describing lectures on popular science here, this makes it clear how strongly pictures were perceived as a trivializing hindrance to the imagination around 1900. Quality content only seemed possible without pictures. Ironically, Kisa's essay itself is interrupted by illustrations after artworks by Gotthardt Kuehl – the essay preceding Kisa's is about this artist, and the illustrations spill over into Kisa's essay.[7]

Despite the unavoidable use of ›new media‹ in school lessons, attempts were made to counteract the dulling of the imagination, for example with the following recommendation: »To train the active imagination, we recommend occasional exercises where the film is stopped and the students are asked: ›What might happen now?‹ This stimulates an abundance of conjectures and calculations; demands imagination; and encourages students to make comparisons and to dig around in the treasure trove of ideas that lie below the threshold of consciousness« (Lampe 1921: 25).

Negative assessments of the effects of film, television and comics[8] on children's reading motivation have continued into the present. Critics argue that the consumption of »prefabricated images« (Singer 1995: 119) obstructs the imaginative faculties. According to Stephen C. Behrendt (1988: 29), illustrations of texts facilitate and emphasize the act of seeing, but at the same time they transform the intended active, imaginative act into a passive, sensory one, thus limiting the reader's own creative and imaginative options (ibid.: 30, 35).[9] In his critique of capitalism and contemporary culture, *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher discusses how the consumption of pop culture in capitalism affects adolescent development, which is characterized by illiteracy and an abundance of pictures: »Teenagers process capital's image-dense data very effectively without any need to read – slogan-recognition is sufficient to navigate the net-mobile-magazine informational

7 This kind of spillover is discussed in Madleen Podewski's essay *Blätter und Blüten und Bilder: Zur medienspezifischen Regulierung von Text-Bild-Beziehungen in der Gartenlaube. Illustriertes Familienblatt*, where she foregrounds this decoupling and intertwining, and points out the complex organization of magazines (Podewski 2016).

8 For comics, see also the prominent example of Fredric Wertham (1955).

9 Even J. R. R. Tolkien was sceptical about illustrations: »However good in themselves, illustrations do little good to fairy-stories. The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a visible presentation and true literature is that it imposes one visible form. Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive« (Tolkien 1983 [1939]: 159).

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plane« (Fisher 2009: 25). The assumption of passivity in the consumption of images, which eventually leads to the loss of reading ability (see e.g. Straßner 2002: 1) has persisted stubbornly and is still implicitly present in research discourses today.[10] The increasing dominance of visual elements in culture has always been equated with trivialization (see e.g. Barthold 2021: 25). On the other hand, the actual visual dimension of ›high literature‹ from the nineteenth century onwards has often been ignored in research (cf. Sillars 1995: 2).

An article from 2008 about the illustration of works by Karl May strikes a different note: »[Illustration] gives visual form to what the text describes, helps to concretize our own imagination (though it can sometimes contradict it), and helps us to apprehend more clearly what we cannot fully visualize for ourselves« (Grünewald 2008: 176). Grünewald's article refers to a survey of 50- to 60-year-old men on the subject of Karl May illustrations. The majority of the respondents were not in favour of illustrated editions, because they saw their own imagination as an essential part of the reading process. Nonetheless, notes Grünewald, illustrations continue to appear in these works because it is still assumed, in this context, that they will promote sales (ibid.: 176f.).

This seems to suggest that illustrations are used mainly in contexts where they can be understood and offered as aids to the imagination. In European illustrated magazines around 1900, we find a plethora of representations of cultures and countries that are largely unfamiliar to the audience (cf. Barthold 2021: 24). Book illustrations are especially popular in Fantasy and Sci-Fi literature, or in the Karl May stories, whose setting is far removed from their Central European audience. The crucial similarity between these genres is that the stories take place in a kind of ›secondary world‹ which readers might struggle to visualize. This coincides with Plünnecke's (1940: 35) concept of ›illustratable genres‹, in which he includes the epic genres, that is, »all those that, in narrating, construct a world for us, or require it as a background«. The representation of this world, especially of the landscapes and places of action, is seen as stimulating the imagination (Grünewald 2008: 190). When Tolkien was creating images for *The Hobbit*, he was also reportedly told that illustrations »with a geographical or landscape content were the most suitable« for the book (Hammond/Scull 2011: 16).

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Today it is unlikely that anyone would see illustrations as a serious danger, yet they do still seem to be evaluated as markers of ›lowbrow‹ literature. This view appears to be particularly prevalent in the German-speaking countries, as Deborah Feldman,

10 See for example a study published in 2020 on the influence of screen time on the power of the imagination (Suggate/Martzog 2020).

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author of the bestseller *Unorthodox*, reported in an interview. The original edition and most of the translations of the book contain photos of Feldman's childhood and youth. According to Feldman, however, the Swiss publisher Secession Verlag, which produced the German edition in 2016, refused to include pictures either on the cover or inside the book. Its justification was that literature did not need pictures, but created pictures in the reader's mind (Feldman 2021: 3:00:36-3:01:08).[11]

In the book *The Art of the Hobbit*, which brings together Tolkien's illustrations, Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull take a conciliatory tone: »In truth, literature as engaging as *The Hobbit* does not need illustrations« (Hammond/Scull 2011: 16). However, they see the author's own illustrations – as opposed to those of third parties – as adding »new dimensions to an already excellent story« (ibid.). This reveals the persistent need to justify the use of illustrations. The text's autonomy is emphasized to distance it from supposedly non-autonomous ›lowbrow‹ literature. This argument seems symptomatic of the consistent denigration of illustrated literature through history.

Kat Menschik's illustrations – for example her illustrated Icelandic sagas – show the same focus on landscapes that can be observed in Tolkien's work. In an interview with the *taz* newspaper, the illustrator says that she largely decides for herself, in consultation with the publisher, which works of classic authors she will illustrate, and that she chooses authors such as Kafka, Poe and E. T. A. Hoffmann, with an interest in fairy-tale, surreal, and dreamlike elements (Menschik 2018). So the idea that the non-real offers more inspiration for illustration still seems to be reflected in the literature selected for illustration today. Images from a foreign, mythological, or even medieval world seem legitimate because they diverge from tangible reality. The endangering of the imagination – one of the main arguments against the illustration of literature – is assumed to be less acute in the case of an imaginative genre like Fantasy literature. This might explain why pictures seem to be more acceptable here. Nonetheless, there are prejudices against illustrated literature for adults even today. The popular picture continues to »form a point of peculiar friction and discomfort across a broad range of intellectual inquiry« (Mitchell 1992: 90).

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11 Given that *Unorthodox* was first published in the USA in the category of women's literature (›chick lit‹), it seems likely that the Swiss publisher saw it as desirable to – in his opinion – ›upgrade‹ the book's status by omitting the pictures (cf. Specht, in this volume: 121).

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The Visual Realization of Fantastic Worlds in Book Cover Design

Melanie Korte

For someone wishing to become an illustrator in the realist field, the most inspiring but also the most important aspect is the observation and study of landscapes and people. Another crucial element is the study of historical images (paintings), which give visual evidence of what life would have looked like in the past. The following article is concerned with conceptual work in the creation of illustrations for fantasy literature, though not so much about the process from the sketch to the elaboration.

There are various approaches to presenting a fantasy story on the cover. Several factors play an important role here, some more important than others. Today marketing and sales departments follow certain guidelines and rules; the different fantasy stories are placed in particular categories from the outset, and this determines the type of cover illustration selected:

1. Representations of Landscapes

Landscape illustrations are usually used for old classic fantasy epics, such as the *Belgariad* series. All the illustrations I have illustrated in this series are based on the epic landscape concepts. As a general rule, epic stories need epic pictures, enabling readers to immerse themselves in the fantasy world immediately and effortlessly. Landscapes make it very easy for viewers to immerse themselves in the new world.

The representation of the epic landscapes usually takes a wide-angled view, in which the landscape can stretch out horizontally. This image format works most effectively when the illustration takes up the whole cover. We know this landscape orientation from television and cinema formats, which have been influential here. More recently, the games industry has also had an impact. The images are familiar from concept art, the pre-production phase when the artists develop preliminary ideas and images on the basis of the script and thus begin to define the world before other artists get involved.

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Fig. 1

The use of perspective in modern landscape illustrations for fantasy book covers is aligned with concept art. This means that there is always a small person in the foreground – usually the protagonist, in rare cases the antagonist. Behind the protagonist, the vastness of the landscape stretches out, usually ending with a monumental structure (a building or a whole town) towards the horizon. In *Belgariad – Die Königin*, the German edition of David Eddings' *Belgariad – Queen of Sorcery*, the ship, or rather the people on the ship, serve to show the scale.

From a conceptual point of view, the person in the foreground serves solely to clarify the scale in the picture. We know from everyday life and from the conventional rules of perspective that a person in the foreground must be depicted as larger than something in the background. If the proportions are reversed, we immediately realize that the structure in the background must be massive. This gives us a sense of epic vastness.

However, we also need this classic composition for an optimum arrangement of the picture on the cover – which also has to contain important information such as the title, the subtitle if applicable, the author and publisher.

Both in the classic *Belgariad* series by David Eddings (first published in English in 1982; a new German edition was published by Blanvalet in 2017) and in a new German four-part fantasy series *Amanda von Waisland* (first published in 2018), the titles are turned into large-format wordmarks, giving them equal status with the landscape.

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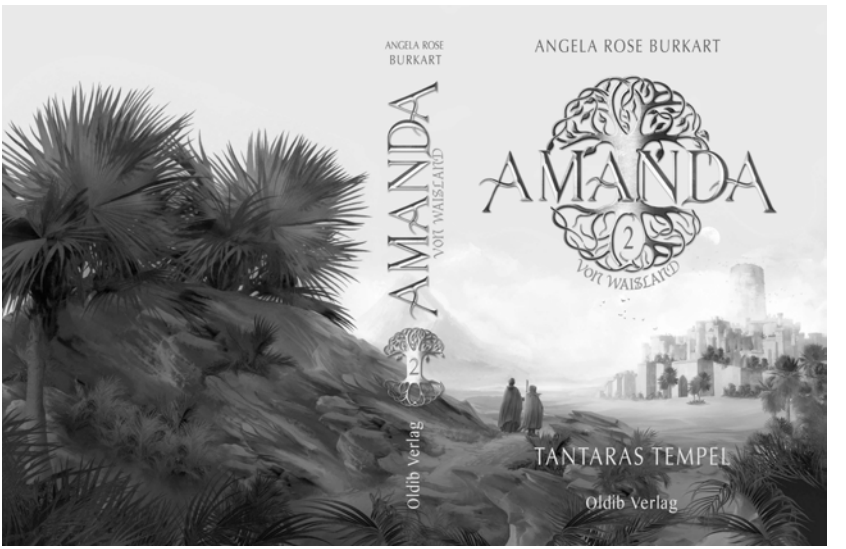
Fig. 2

Fig. 3



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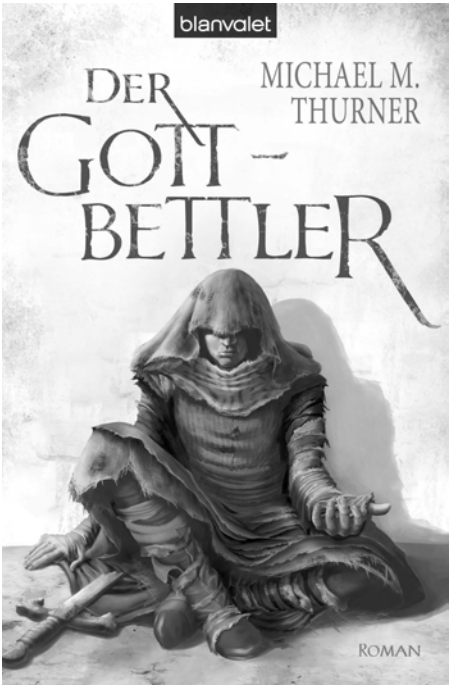
2. Representations of People/Heroes

Things are different when it comes to representations of people or the detailed depiction of the protagonist. Here the distribution of space on the cover is always in favour of the person/the protagonist. This person has to take up almost all the space on the cover, otherwise we will not perceive them as important. They also have the function of generating sympathy, since otherwise the potential buyer will not pick up the book. Covers with this image composition always dispense with an elaborate wordmark. Here the title serves to accentuate the person depicted. *Der Gottbettler* (The God Beggar) by Michael M. Thurner was an exception: here it was possible to place a large wordmark because the protagonist is sitting on the ground like a beggar. Because of this position, he only takes up a fraction of the cover in comparison to a standing figure.

Fig. 4



One distinctive feature that became common from 2010 onwards was the depiction of people with their faces partly concealed. The covering of the eyes, sometimes down to the tip of the nose, was meant to create a sense of mystery, but also to allow

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readers to use their own imagination. The point of this marketing strategy, however, was not to generate any antipathy in the observer. In most cases, the cover is the critical factor in the purchase of the book, unless it is by a well-known or even famous author. Covers must therefore fulfil certain requirements set by the marketing and sales departments. Here the effects of the mainstream and social media are particularly noticeable: the taste of the masses must be catered to.

The well-known series by Trudi Canavan may also be mentioned as prominent examples of this trend here. The protagonists have their hoods pulled down so far that their faces cannot be recognized. Thus, the decisive selling point is the buyer's own idea about what the person under the hood might look like. In other words, there are hints, but nothing is specified. To avoid showing the protagonist's face without having to cover it up, another variant has been developed: depicting the person from behind. This type of representation has not become widespread and is still fairly seldom used (an example is Patrick Rothfuss' series at Klett Cotta / Hobbit Presse.

Fig. 5

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In recent years, representations of people have receded into the background again, since it has proven more and more difficult to design a person who will appeal to everyone and thus inspire a corresponding sympathy among all potential buyers. The difficulty of catering to all tastes cannot be resolved by means of portraits. A further reason to reject portraits of protagonists is the rapid changes in our visual language. In some cases, illustrators have been commissioned to produce cover art showing the protagonist in a full-body pose, but only a detail from the illustration has been chosen for the final product.

Fig. 6

In these exhaustive images, armour, clothes and weapons play a more important role, and these areas therefore have to be elaborated in more detail than in a representation of the whole person, where the focus is on the face. The garments and armour in the cover illustrations must give an unmistakable sense of which epoch has inspired the novel. Even if there is more room to manoeuvre here because armour and clothing have undergone extensive design developments thanks to our film and gaming industries, there must still be a clearly discernible reference: is this some kind of crusader, or a knight from the late Middle Ages?

Thus, clothing and armour have also become part of our mainstream language. In *Der Weg des Inquisitors*, the computer game series *Diablo* is the inspiration for both the novel and the cover illustration. The pre-eminent theme is the battle between divine heaven (angels and gods) and the demons of hell (devils). Here the armour and especially the tabards have been redesigned, leaving only a hint of the originals.

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2.1 The Significance of the Mainstream in the Representation of Characters in Fantasy Literature

Obviously, we still benefit today from the knowledge and development of earlier epochs, but today's art is also in a constant state of evolution. And it has never evolved at such a rapid pace as in our present time. Social media have a huge influence (sometimes positive, sometimes negative) on our world of images, thus accelerating the development of visual language. This can also be observed in publishing houses, which produce new editions of some books very soon – less than five years – after the initial publication, in the hope of regaining the attention of current audiences.

The earlier paintings and pictures of the Middle Ages serve only as a point of reference for those times. For many years they helped us to imagine what life might have looked like in the past. But stories such as the *Lord of the Rings* or *Game of Thrones* have have completely replaced these old images with their own version of the Middle Ages and now serve as models for new developments. Here too, it is essential to keep creating new designs – and ideally to stay ahead of one's time.

This is why the medieval and early modern pictures, even the medievalist imaginations of the 19th century, are no longer relevant for our modern visual language for the fantasy genre. Our visual language is based on the new modern implementations and can only develop in this way.

If fantasy illustrators were to continue using the medieval paintings as basics, the fantasy novel would no longer be distinguishable from the historical novel. Historical novels have their own audience. The distinction must remain clear also in terms of illustrations. Every epoch of the Middle Ages had different styles of representation – and this applies especially to depictions of people. These dominant styles changed many times over this 1000-year period. In the German-speaking countries, representations of people have proven more and more difficult over recent years, since the influence of other countries is very strong, and the mainstream in fantasy is not defined in the German-speaking area. Here the American market is at the forefront. Furthermore, most big epics such as *Game of Thrones*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Witcher* are not written or filmed in the German-speaking countries. Most books are purchased from overseas publishers, often with their cover rights. This has a major impact on the development of images on our book market.

2.2 Scenarios: Another Popular Representation of and with People is Their Integration into Fully Described Scenes from the Novel

When characters are integrated into a complete scene they have to be represented in a slightly smaller size for optimum interaction with their surroundings. These staged compositions come from classical painting and are still found frequently to-

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day. Here too, it is seldom possible to work with wordmarks, since the scene usually requires a higher degree of detail and thus more space.

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

3. Emblematic Representations

The development of emblems in recent years has its origin in coats of arms. This direct link can always be found in fantasy novels, as in other genres, and is a clear distinguishing feature from the medieval period. Even if it would be appropriate, in the case of vast serial epics like *A Song of Ice and Fire*, to represent them with landscapes,

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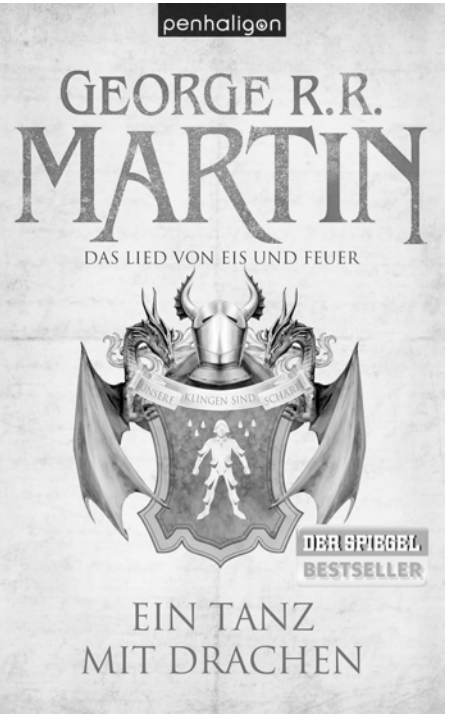
publishers have instead chosen to use the coats of arms of the different houses. Even the 2010 German edition of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, published by Penhaligon, alludes strongly to the medieval language of heraldry. Not just the coat of arms itself, in the middle, but also the 'parchment' background are meant to convey a sense of something 'old'. Precisely because the first volumes have little to do with magic, and the whole story is very dark and brutal, the publisher deliberately chose this reference to history. In the tenth book of A Song of Ice and Fire I had to illustrate the skinned man in the middle of the coat of arms.

Fig. 9



It was only with the later edition (shortly after the launch of season one of the HBO series *Game of Thrones*) that the novels were reissued with the emblematic logo design. The advantage of a purely emblematic cover design is that it is concise and clearly identifiable with the series. It can also serve as a substitute for a logo. The advantage of a logo or figurative mark is its recognition value. At a time when we are inundated with images, simplicity is a successful strategy. The same strategy has

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been used in the Netflix series *The Witcher*, but also in the new German edition of the novels the series is based on, published by dtv.

Fig. 10

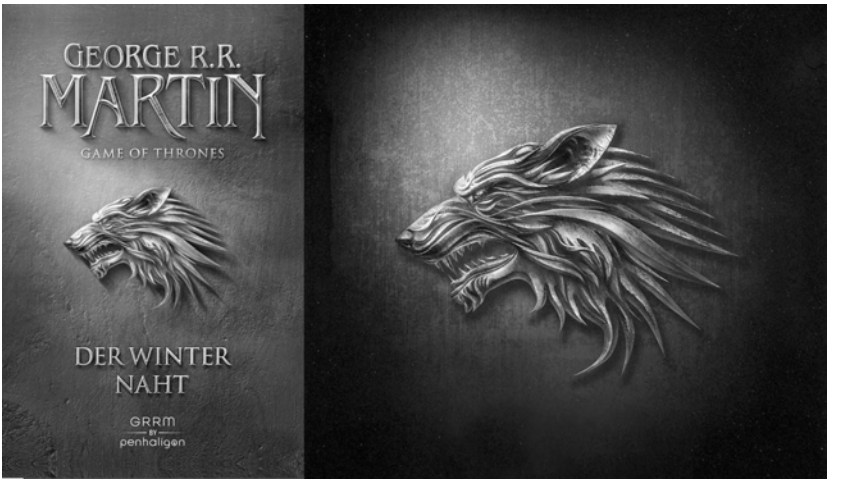

Fig. 11

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In both series, the focus is on the wolf. In both series, the wolves represent the first books. However, the design of the two wolves is different enough to avoid any confusion between the series. The language of emblems offers more wide-ranging options for design than, for example, landscapes, where the illustrator is constrained by the facts of nature. A further advantage of emblematic representations is that they avoid restricting or even influencing the reader's imagination. This is the most neutral and functional language in the world of book covers.

4. Conclusion: The Illustrator as a Creative Professional in the Book World

Commissioned work is no longer what it once was; book illustration is no longer the dream job that it is imagined to be. Just in the last ten years, the profession has undergone a number of transformations. Illustrators have less and less freedom. The flood of fantasy images in the media means that many people already have fixed pictures in their minds. As a result, there is less and less scope for creativity, and the artist is often just the executor.

Marketing and product placement play such a huge role that publishers, in extreme cases, are only trying to benefit from the success of other novels. The result of this are covers that are very similar – and deliberately so.

But even here there are particular illustrations that stand out and constitute a challenge for the illustrator, despite very strict specifications from the publisher. The cover illustration for Harry Connolly's *Die Pforte der Schatten* (Blanvalet, German translation of *The Way Into Chaos*) exactly matches the publisher's specifications. The knights' blood on the ground is symbolized by the red flags.

Despite all the publishers' stipulations, all illustrations require the production of a sketch after the briefing. This is followed by the elaboration, culminating in the final draft. Creating illustrations is still a craft that the illustrator acquires over many years and requires the illustrator to have a great deal of spatial thinking and knowledge. Even if the specifications are often very precise and leave little room for maneuver, it is the illustrator's responsibility to implement them skillfully and to the best of his knowledge.

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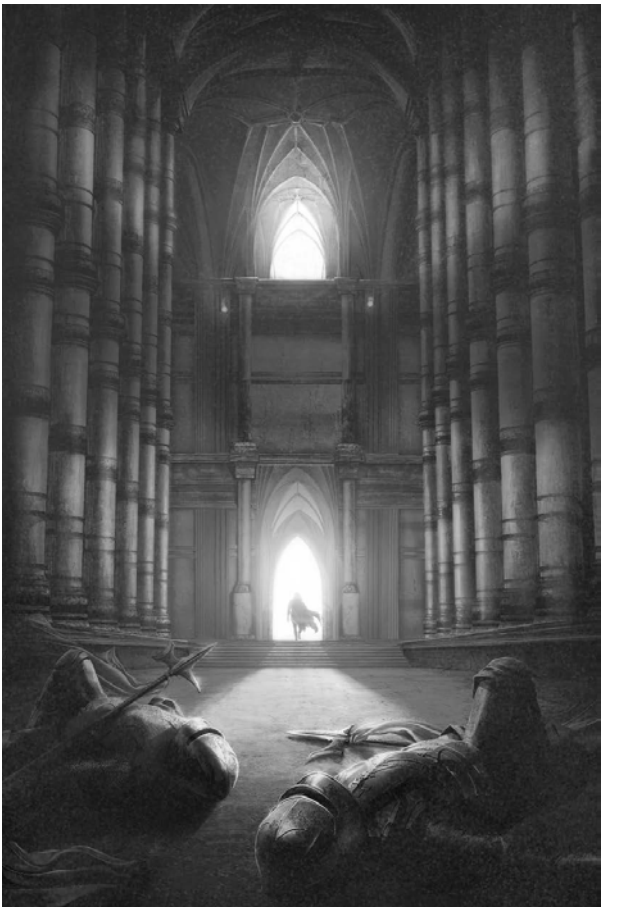
Fig. 12



Illustrations

Fig. 1: David Eddings ›Belgariad 4; The Queen‹, drawn by Melanie Korte, 2019, © Blanvalet/Randomhouse Group.

Fig. 2: Angela R. Burkart ›Amanda von Waisland 2; Tantaras Tempel‹, drawn by Melanie Korte, 2019, © Oldib Publisher.

Fig. 3: Angela R. Burkart ›Amanda von Waisland 2; Tantaras Tempel‹, drawn by Melanie Korte including graphical design, 2019, © Oldib Publisher.

Fig. 4: Michael M. Thurner ›Der Gottbettler‹, drawn by Melanie Korte (née Miklitza), 2013, © Blanvalet/Randomhouse Group.

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Fig. 5: Patrick Rothfuss ›Musik der Stille‹, drawn by Melanie Korte, 2019, © Klett Cotta / Hobbit Presse.

Fig. 6: Jeff Salyards ›Tanz der Klingen‹, drawn by Melanie Korte, 2016, © Heyne / Randomhouse Group.

Fig. 7: S.A. Bottlinger ›Der Fluch des Wüstenfeuers‹, drawn by Melanie Korte, 2016, © Klett Cotta / Hobbitpresse.

Fig. 8: Tad Williams ›Das Reich der Grasländer‹ (German translation of *Empire of Grass*), draft drawn by Melanie Korte, Klett Cotta/Hobbit Presse.

Fig. 9: George R.R. Martin ›A Song of Ice and Fire – A Dance with Dragons‹, the skinned man drawn by Melanie Korte (née Miklitza), graphic design and illustration by Isabelle Hirtz, 2012, © Penhaligon / Randomhouse Group.

Fig. 10: George R.R. Martin ›Game of Thrones – Der Winter naht‹ drawn by Melanie Korte (née Miklitza) and Isabelle Hirtz, 2012, © Penhaligon / Randomhouse Group).

Fig. 11: Andrzej Sapowski ›Der Hexer – das Erbe der Elfen‹ drawn by Melanie Korte and Isabelle Hirtz, 2019, © dtv.

Fig. 12: Harry Connolly ›Die Pforte der Schatten‹ drawn by Melanie Korte (née Miklitza), 2016, © Blanvalet / Randomhouse Group.

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Beautiful and Sublime – and Never Mind the Pointed Ears

Visualising the Elves throughout the Centuries[1]

Thomas Honegger

1. Introduction

The world of the elves was changed for good in the first decade of the 21st century when Peter Jackson's movie adaptations of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* were successfully screened in cinemas all around the world. The tall, fair-skinned, blue- or grey-eyed, blonde, and slightly androgynous *Albi Jacsonenses* became the prototypical elves of the 21st century and dominated the way the denizens of Faërie have been depicted in art, movies, video games, role playing games, graphic novels, anime etc. It could therefore be argued that Tolkien's Elf, in the *interpretatio Jacsonensis*, has become the dominant paradigmatic model for the first decades of the 21st century.[2]

Yet while a post-Jackson audience may take the paradigmatic *Albus Jacsonensis* as a cultural given, it has not always been clear how one should visualise the Tolkienian Elf, and the pre-Jackson imaginary of Faërie featured depictions of elves that differ considerably from what we now take for granted.

In the following, I am going to explore the question of which earlier models provided the artists with the inspiration for their visualisations of figures such as Legolas or, to a lesser extent, Galadriel. In a first step, I am going to investigate the predominant popular ideas of elves and fairies in the last decades of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries – an era during which Tolkien's imaginary, which found its culmination in the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, was developing. Subsequently, I will discuss how Tolkien's Elves were depicted by the various artists illustrating both *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55) and conclude with

1 My thanks to Dr. Allan Turner for his expert comments and criticism. All (remaining) mistakes are my own.

2 There exist, of course, alternative traditions such as the disturbingly sinister yet alluring elves in Susanne Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* (2004) and its adaptation as a TV mini-series in 2015.

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some thoughts on the influence of Peter Jackson's two movie trilogies, *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003) and *The Hobbit* (2012–2014).

Fig. 1: Elves leave Middle-earth

2. »Ye light fairy things tripping so gay« – Victorian Flower Fairies and Diminishing[3]

There are many people who would have loved the 'Prologue' of *The Lord of the Rings* to feature not only chapters such as 'Concerning Hobbits' or 'Concerning Pipe-weed', but also something like 'Concerning Elves' or 'Concerning Lembas'. However, since the account of the War of the Ring is »hobbito-centric« (Tolkien 2000: 237), these readers had to wait for *The Silmarillion* (1977) and other posthumously published texts such as *Unfinished Tales* (1980) or *The History of Middle-earth* series (1983–1996). There they would find finally more in-depth information about the history of the Elves, their customs, and cultural characteristics.

Tolkien must have been aware that the few facts given about the Elves would make it difficult to visualise them in a way that accorded with Tolkien's largely implicit conception of them and the way that they fitted into his fictional world. He addresses this problem in Appendix F of *The Lord of the Rings*, where he writes first

3 Fimi, in chapters 2 to 4 (2008: 13–67) of her excellent study *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*, discusses the development of the elves and fairies in the relevant folklore and literature.

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about his choice of using the term Elf/Elves for referring to the Quendi and then – for the first time in a text accessible to the public at large – gives a general description of their appearance:

> This old word [Elf/Elves] was indeed the only one available, and was once fitted to apply to such memories of this people as Men preserved, or to the makings of Men's minds not wholly dissimilar. But it has been diminished, and to many it may now suggest fancies either pretty or silly, as unlike to the Quendi of old as are butterflies to the swift falcon – not that any of the Quendi ever possessed wings of the body, as unnatural to them as to Men. They were a race high and beautiful, the older Children of the world, and among them the Eldar were as kings, who now are gone: the People of the Great Journey, the People of the Stars. They were tall, fair of skin and grey-eyed, though their locks were dark, save in the golden house of Finarfin; and their voices had more melodies than any mortal voice that now is heard. (Tolkien 2004: 1137, Appendix F)

Tolkien, like Jacob Grimm,[4] resorts to an older word and concept. In Tolkien's case, he is eager to distinguish his inhabitants of Faërie from the fairies of folk lore and contemporary popular Victorian and Edwardian imagination. This is also the motivation for his use of terms like 'diminished' and 'butterflies', which refer to the widespread imaginary of the diminutive, winged flower fairies, against which he had to re-establish the older tradition of the majestic denizens of the Otherworld.

One of the challenges that the young Tolkien encountered when writing about these otherworldly beings was the unregulated existence of numerous names and concepts. Carl Linnaeus's systematic classification of the natural world stopped short of dragons, sirens, unicorns and the like,[5] and the proponents of the Enlightenment had neglected the systematic classification of the supernatural world. In the case of the mysterious and (at its inception) baffling term 'hobbit', Tolkien could rely on his philological and artistic talents to 'uncover' and develop the meaning and concept behind the word.[6] Yet when exploring the complexities of the denizens of the Otherworld, he would need more than a children's story to make sense. The English language knows a plethora of terms for all kinds of beings related to the supernatural,[7] of which the French-derived 'fairies' was the most popular one. Faced with such an unregulated terminology and an equally chaotic diversity of concepts,

4 See Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie I* (Cap. XVII, esp. pp. 365–369), where he differentiates between *Elben* on the one hand, and *Elfen* and *Feen*, on the other.

5 See Honegger (2019: 17–20) on Linnaeus's treatment of the dragon within his systematic classification.

6 See Honegger (2023a: 142–147) for a summary of the scholarship on this topic.

7 See, for example, the list given in the second volume of *The Denham Tracts* (Denham 1895: 77–80), where we also find, on page 79, 'hobbits'.

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Tolkien at first chose to call some of his (Elvish) denizens of Faërie 'Gnomes',[8] i.e. 'the wise'. Luckily, Tolkien realised that the etymological fit of the label might satisfy his scholarly instincts, yet was likely to provoke unwanted associations with other types of 'gnomes' among the general, less etymologically astute audience.[9] Yet 'fairies' was not really an alternative. Ever since William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) and Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia or The Court of Faery* (1627), the term has become associated with diminutive, mostly harmless creatures who have little in common with the demonic 'ylfe' of the Old English epic *Beowulf* (ca. 800 AD), the threatening inhabitants of the Otherworld in the Middle English romance *Sir Orfeo* (ca. 1330),[10] or some of the protagonists[11] in Edmund Spenser's *The Faërie Queen* (1590/1596), who are »high-minded and powerful, perilous and fair, as well as indistinguishable in size and shape from mortal men« (Hillman 2018: 35).

Indeed, the predominant paradigm of 'fairies' during the Victorian and Edwardian periods was one of diminutive prettiness in the tradition of Mercutio's Queen Mab (*Romeo and Juliet* I, 4) and Drayton's *Nymphidia*. This breed of fairies became popular with the appearance of the aptly named Peaseblossom and Mustardseed who, next to Cobweb and Moth, have come to represent the enchanted realm of forests and meadows in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The popularity of the play ensured their presence throughout the centuries and the theatre costumes both reflected and influenced contemporary visualisations of fairies. Consequently, most of the fairies encountered on stage, in the early movies, in book-illustrations, or on postcards were of the flower-fairy type.

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8 See *The Book of Lost Tales 1* (Tolkien 1994: 237–245). These Gnomes were the Noldoli, which later became the Noldor Elves.

9 He faced a similar problem with his orcs, which developed out of the (hob-)goblins found in *The Hobbit*. See Honegger (forthcoming) for a discussion of this problem.

10 The Middle English *Sir Orfeo* (ca. 1300) was known to Tolkien at the latest from his *A Middle English Vocabulary* (1922), which was made as a supplement for Sisam's anthology of *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (1921) (see also Honegger 2010). The poem features elves that are at once courtly, noble, and threatening: the king of Faërie abducts Orfeo's wife Heurodis and keeps her at his court. The Otherworld shown in the poem is similar to our own world and Tolkien's description of Faërie fits it very well: »*Faërie* contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted« (Tolkien 2008: 32). See Tolkien's translation of *Sir Orfeo*, especially lines 141–161 (Tolkien 1995: 126), where we are given a description of the King of Faery and his retinue and the realm of Faërie with its castles, woods, pastures etc. We have here obviously a synthesis of Celtic (*sidhe*) and classical mythological (Hades, Orpheus) elements that are interpreted within a medieval-courtly framework.

11 Spenser refers to them as Elfe, Elfin Knight, Faerie, or Faerie's son.

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Fig. 2: Fairy revel by Warwick Goble (1920)

It is therefore no surprise that the depiction of the 'sprites of the wood' in one of Tolkien's early texts, the poem 'Wood-sunshine' from July 1910, is still in accordance with the predominant flower-fairy tradition.

Come sing ye light fairy things tripping so gay,
Like visions, like glinting reflections of joy
All fashion'd of radiance, careless of grief,

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O'er this green and brown carpe; not hasten away.
O! come to me! Dance for me! Sprites of the wood,
O! come to me! Sing to me once ere ye fade!
(Carpenter 1995: 55)

Fig. 3: Still from the movie La Fée aux choux (Alice Guy, France 1896/1900)

We do not have any known illustrations to this early poem, but it should be quite clear that the 'fairy things' mentioned in the text are not the same as the later Quendi Elves but rather like »butterflies to the swift falcon« (Tolkien 2004: 1137, Appendix F).

Probably best known and of relevance for Tolkien is James M. Barrie's (1860–1937) play *Peter Pan*. Peter made his first appearance in *The Little White Bird* (1902)[12] and gained popular and lasting fame in the West End stage play *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow* (1904),[13] which was then expanded into the novel *Peter and Wendy* (1911). In between these texts he underwent a rather interesting development from the ghost of a deceased baby boy floating to Kensington Gardens to spend there some time with fairies and other sprites, to the Peter Pan of the Disney movie from 1953.[14]

12 Chapters 13–18 were published independently in 1906 as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*.

13 Tolkien attended a performance of *Peter Pan* in April 1910 at the Prince of Wales Theatre in Birmingham and was obviously quite impressed (Scull and Hammond 2017, *Chronology*, p. 23).

14 This movie Peter Pan is based on the play and its later novelization, and has little in common with the baby ghost of the original *The Little White Bird* (1902). See also the illustrations by Arthur Rackham, which show a realistically painted baby boy floating across the rooftops of London – a scene hardly associated by any post-Disney movie audience with Peter Pan.

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The diminutive flower fairies survive in form of Peter's companion Tinker Bell[15] and Peter's imploration of the audience to save the poisoned Tinker Bell by loudly proclaiming their belief in the existence of fairies has become the emotional climax of every performance. These fairies, as encountered in the play and its later spin-offs,[16] are the relatives of the harmless diminutive sprites known from the nursery tale books. Consequently, the artists illustrating these texts have availed themselves of the pictorial elements typical of the flower-fairy tradition. Disney's movie is thus the logical endpoint of this development and has become in itself foundational for the later perception of fairies.[17]

Fig. 4: Tinker Bell by Diarmuid Byron O'Connor (2005)

15 On stage, Tinker Bell was usually represented as a darting light and her speech was produced with bells.

16 This is not to say that even the tiny flower fairies could not have a rather tempestuous temperament, as Tinker Bell proves.

17 This is reinforced by the later Tinker Bell film series (2008–2015).

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Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was relevant not only for its proto flower fairies, but also for the preservation of the more threatening aspect of Faërie in the form of Oberon and Titania and, to some extent, Puck. While Shakespeare took inspiration for the latter from Reginald Scott's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), which features a demonic hobgoblin of that name,[18] the play also preserves the tradition that links the inhabitants of Faërie to the mythological tradition of antiquity (Titania) and the medieval chivalric romances (Oberon). Furthermore, the royal couple's conflict about the boy who had been stolen by Titania from an Indian king even makes use of the traditional motif of the changeling, i.e. the belief that fairies exchange human babies with their unattractive fairy offspring. In the centuries after Shakespeare, these more sinister aspects tended to be dissociated from the diminutive fairies and were projected onto the less attractive inhabitants of Faërie, such as the goblins, hobgoblins, leprechauns etc., so that the fairies themselves could develop into childlike representatives of unspoiled nature. This also led to an association between fairies and children, which found its culmination in the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

Fig. 5: Fairy King and Queen (1910)

18 See Ryan (2009) for a detailed discussion of the origin of Puck.

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In spite of this general trend towards depicting fairies as a diminutive and cute species, the alternative tradition of portraying them as the disturbing inhabitants of a sinister and mysterious Otherworld had not died out completely. The very same J.M. Barrie who created Tinker Bell and the fairies of Kensington Garden, has given us also the sinisterly threatening, human-abducting fairies of *Mary Rose* (1920). The haunting play revolves around the eponymous heroine who is twice abducted into the Otherworld while visiting a remote Scottish island. While she returns the first time after 21 days and does not possess any memory of the time spent in the Otherworld, the second time she is absent for decades and upon her return encounters her grown-up son who is now older than herself. The play makes use of many of the traditional elements connected to Faërie, such as how time there passes differently, but it never shows the denizens of the Otherworld on stage. This makes them even more mysterious and unwittingly follows Tolkien's recommendation, which he formulated in his 1939 Andrew-Lang lecture 'On Fairy-stories', of not depicting the supernatural on stage:

> In human art Fantasy is a thing best left to words, to true literature. […] But Drama is naturally hostile to Fantasy. Fantasy, even of the simplest kind, hardly ever succeeds in Drama, when that is presented as it should be, visibly and audibly acted. Fantastic forms are not to be counterfeited. Men dressed up as talking animals may achieve buffoonery or mimicry, but they do not achieve Fantasy. This is, I think, well illustrated by the failure of the bastard form, pantomime. The nearer it is to 'dramatized fairy-story' the worse it is. (Tolkien 2008: 61f.)

While stage productions may be well advised to avoid presenting fairies in any form (*pace* Shakespeare) so as not to endanger the audience's suspension of disbelief, book illustrations and paintings do not suffer from this problem to the same degree. And indeed, we have no lack of visualisations of the flower-fairy types by artists such as (Emma) Florence Harrison (1877–1955) or Cicely Mary Barker (1895–1973). What we do not have, however, is a comparable paradigmatic visual tradition for the beautiful and sublime and sometimes awe- and fear-inspiring denizens of Faërie. Again, Tolkien's texts and illustrations are of relevance.

3. »He loved elves, though he seldom met them; but he was a little frightened of them too.« (Tolkien 2002: 92): Tracing the 'Other' Tradition

The first time the readers of Tolkien's published tales had the chance to encounter Tolkien's Elves was in *The Hobbit* (1937), more specifically in the context of the company's approach to Rivendell in the third chapter 'A Short Rest'. When Bilbo rides

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into the valley, his first impression is: »Hmmm! It smells like elves!« (Tolkien 2002: 91). The olfactory encounter, which is indicative of the semi-humorous treatment of things in the first half of *The Hobbit* and which makes it so difficult to achieve a consistent visualisation, is then complemented by the auditory element of Elvish speech, laughter, and song: »So they laughed and sang in the trees; and pretty fair nonsense I daresay you think it. Not that they would care; they would only laugh all the more if you told them so. They were elves of course« (Tolkien 2002: 92). And then finally we see them: »Soon Bilbo caught glimpses of them as the darkness deepened. He loved elves, though he seldom met them; but he was a little frightened of them too« (Tolkien 2002: 92).

Although the inhabitants of Rivendell, as Hillman (2018: 33) points out, are not part of the flower-fairy tribe and definitively not of diminutive size, the narrator's description still contains several elements that link them to their Victorian and Edwardian counterparts.[19] First, they are laughing and singing 'pretty fair nonsense'. Second, they are 'in the trees' – both elements prominent in the flower-fairy tradition. The presence of flower-fairy characteristics renders a clear visualisation of the scene problematic. I have found only two artists who chose to visualise this scene for their illustrations of the novel. The first one is Michael Hague (1948-), who illustrated this scene for the 1984 illustrated edition of *The Hobbit*.[20] Mindful of the fact that Tolkien's Elves of Rivendell are human-sized people, he shows us two figures clad in flowing medieval garb who are playing their harps while balancing rather precariously on the branches of the trees. The second artist to attempt a visualisation of Bilbo's encounter with the singing Elves is the Latvian painter Laima Eglīte (1945-). The illustrated Latvian edition of *The Hobbit* (1991) shows diminutive, shining, insect-winged fairies hovering in the trees[21] and thus clearly harks back to the Victorian prototype of the insect-winged flower fairy.

How, we may ask, are two such radically different interpretations of the same scene possible? The answer lies, on the one hand, in the scant and ambiguous evidence available in the original text and, on the other, in the absence of authorial il-

19 David Wenzel, in his graphic novel adaptation of *The Hobbit* (1990), visualises the inhabitants of Rivendell as human-sized people in medievalising clothes with pointed ears. However, the welcome scene where Elrond embraces Gandalf (Wenzel 2006: 25) contains some elements in the depiction of Elrond's retinue that echo illustrations of Titania and Oberon and her following from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see, for example, Sir Noel Paton's *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania* (1849) at (Wikipedia, online).

20 Since the picture is protected by copyright, I have to refer the interested reader to the pictures found on the net. See, for example (Rolozo Tolkien, online). It can be found on page 243 of the edition of *The Hobbit* (1984) illustrated by Michael Hague and also featured in the 1986 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar.

21 Since the picture is protected by copyright, I have to refer the interested reader to the pictures found on the net. See, for example (Merriner 2019, online).

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lustrations of Elves.[22] Indeed, there exists only one painting that arguably contains Elves: *Taur-na-Fuin* from 1928.[23] The picture lived multiple lives, but in the version relevant for our discussion, it shows how the Sinda Beleg finds the elf-prince Gwindor who escaped imprisonment by Morgoth. Both figures are so tiny that a less than careful viewer is likely to miss them. They are actually hardly bigger than the mushrooms growing in the forest, and though Beleg carries an oversized sword in his belt, they are reminiscent rather of the flower-fairy tradition than the heroic vision of the Elves that Tolkien developed in his legendarium. On the other hand, *The Hobbit* as an originally largely independent children's tale, still has one hairy foot in the world of Victorian and Edwardian children's literature, and its elvish protagonists therefore retain occasionally some of the characteristics of their flower fairy counterparts. This ambiguity is also visible in the depiction of the Wood-elves, whom Bilbo and the dwarves encounter during their attempt to traverse Mirkwood. The first indication is given by Bombur's account of his dreams of a feasting company and the sound of far-off laughter and song.[24] Eventually, they follow the light and the sound of voices and come upon a company of feasting Wood-elves who, in good traditional fairy fashion,[25] disappear as soon as they notice the intruders. This procedure is repeated a few times until, after the interlude with the spiders of Mirkwood, all but Bilbo find themselves prisoners in the dungeons of the royal palace of the Wood-elves. These treat the dwarves decently since, as the narrator points out, the »Wood-elves were not goblins, and were reasonably well-behaved even to their worst enemies, when they captured them« (Tolkien 2002: 221). Indeed, a few pages before, the readers have been given a rather extensive description of the origin of the Wood-elves:

> The feasting people were Wood-elves, of course. These are not wicked folk. If they have a fault it is distrust of strangers. Though their magic was strong, even in those

22 This lacuna may have inspired some of the illustrators with non-British backgrounds to draw from their own cultural heritage.

23 The picture was first published in 1979 in *Pictures by JRR Tolkien* (no. 37, no pagination). It can be accessed, for example, at (Kelley 2022, online). See also Douglas A. Anderson's comment in his *The Annotated Hobbit* (Tolkien 2002: 297, note 11): »Tolkien's own artwork does not provide any further clues, for in the only drawing in which he depicts elves, they appear as very small figures, and features such as ears are not visible. See the drawing *Taur-na-Fuin* in *Artist* (No. 54).«

24 See: »At times they heard disquieting laughter. Sometimes there was singing in the distance too. The laughter was the laughter of fair voices not of goblins, and the singing was beautiful, but it sounded eerie and strange, and they were not comforted, rather they hurried on from those parts with what strength they had left« (Tolkien 2002: 199).

25 The earliest extant textual witness for this tradition is probably to be found in Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, where the young knight happens to come upon a company of twenty-four dancing women who all disappear as soon as he approaches.

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> days they were wary. They differed from the High Elves of the West, and were more dangerous and less wise. For most of them (together with their scattered relations in the hills and mountains) were descended from the ancient tribes that never went to Faerie in the West. There the Light-elves and the Deep-elves and the Sea-elves went and lived for ages, and grew fairer and wiser and more learned, and invented their magic and their cunning craft in the making of beautiful and marvellous things, before some came back into the Wide World. In the Wide World the Wood-elves lingered in the twilight of our Sun and Moon, but loved best the stars; and they wandered in the great forests that grew tall in lands that are now lost. They dwelt most often by the edges of the woods, from which they could escape at times to hunt, or to ride and run over the open lands by moonlight or starlight; and after the coming of Men they took ever more and more to the gloaming and the dusk. Still elves they were and remain, and that is Good People. (Tolkien 2002: 218f.)

I have quoted the passage in full since it illustrates several points that are of relevance for the visualisation of the Elves. First, we note an almost complete absence of any information concerning their appearance. Second, the narrator (Tolkien) is indulging in a bit of a digression into the history of the different Elvish tribes as to be found in the (at that time unpublished) texts of his legendarium. The problem with this passage is that it gives, on the one hand, a great deal of historical-ethnographical information yet, on the other, it does not help with our problem of how to visualise these Good People.

Scouring the entire text of *The Hobbit*, I found only few passages giving us any hints towards the appearance of these Elves. Thus, we get to know that the Wood-elves are »all dressed in green and brown« (Tolkien 2002: 204) and that »at the head of a long line of feasters sat a woodland king with a crown of leaves upon his golden hair, […]. Their gleaming hair was twined with flowers; green and white gems glinted on their collars and their belts; and their faces and their songs were filled with mirth. Loud and clear and fair were those songs, […]« (Tolkien 2002: 206). Furthermore, »[i]n a great hall with pillars hewn out of the living stone sat the Elvenking on a chair of carven wood. On his head was a crown of berries and red leaves, for the autumn was come again. In the spring he wore a crown of woodland flowers. In his hand he held a carven staff of oak« (Tolkien 2002: 223). This is better than nothing yet still leaves much to the reader's or artist's imagination, and most illustrators focus on the Elvenking rather than his retainers since the greater part of the scant information relates to his person. Not quite surprisingly, the resulting visual concretisations differ considerably. Horus Engels's black-and-white illustration to the German translation of *The Hobbit* (*Kleiner Hobbit und der große Zauberer* 1957) is arguably the earliest published depiction of a Tolkienian Elf (Weirdlandtv 2021, online). It shows an aristocratic-looking gentleman in tight-fitting medievalising clothes. He is, as described in the text, sitting on a chair of carven wood; on his head we can see a crown

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of berries and leaves, and he holds a long and slim sceptre in his right hand. The Elvenking's face expresses both nobility and a certain haughtiness, and Engels's visualisation captures very well the ambiguity exhibited by the denizens of the Otherworld, at least since the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*.

Two decades later, the movie directors Arthur Rankin and Jules Bass opt for a radically different interpretation of both the Wood-elves and the Elvenking. Instead of a slightly ethereal and aristocratic figure, the audience of the animated movie version of *The Hobbit* (1977) faces an ugly emaciated greenish gnome-like creature (cf. Cedmagic, online) reminiscent of H.G. Wells's Morlocks rather than the sprites of the wood. However, this is not the acme of strangeness, which is arguably reached in the 1991 Latvian edition of *The Hobbit*. Laima Eglīte, who presented us the insect-winged flower fairies in the trees of Rivendell, astonishes the readers with an illustration of the Elvenking as a winged green alien (cf. Merriner 2019, online). In between we have the 1984 (paperback 1987) edition of *The Hobbit* illustrated by the American artist and illustrator Michael Hague. His pictures are characterised by their subdued and earthy colours, and his Elves sport the medieval dress that has become standard since the 19th century depictions of the Middle Ages and lack clearly distinguishing features such as (visible) pointed ears. The overall effect of Hague's 'idealised historic realism' is that his Elves are no longer discernible from his normal human beings, and his depiction of Thorin in front of the Elvenking in his halls (Tolkien 1984: 153) could serve as an illustration of any medieval tale. This also explains why the aforementioned depiction of the Elves in the trees in Rivendell strike a discordant note – they are not sufficiently otherworldly to get away with such antics. This may be also one of the reasons why Hague's illustrations have found an appreciative following among Tolkien-aficionados, yet they have not had much of an impact on the development of the mainstream imaginary of Tolkien's works in general and his Elves in particular – they are simply too much like normal medievalised people.[26] The same is also true for David Wenzel's depiction of the Elves in the graphic novel adaptation of *The Hobbit* (1990), though he makes a point of showing his Elves' pointed ears as a distinguishing feature.

Things have been put back on track, so to speak, by Jackson's movie trilogy of *The Hobbit* (2012–2014) in which the American actor Lee Pace gives us an iconic Thranduil (cf. Hobbit Wiki, online). Lee Pace, with his 1,96 metres, not only looks the part, echoing the haughty nobility of Horus Engels's illustration, but he also succeeds in imbuing his character with an uncanny otherworldly cruelty that is reminiscent of the Elvenking in *Sir Orfeo* and may have inspired Marc Warren's interpretation of The Gentleman in the BBC adaptation of *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* (2015). Pictorially,

26 See also the other illustrations where Elves occur (cf. Tolkien 1984: 169, 237, 253). The last example shows Bilbo presenting the Arkenstone to Bard and the Elvenking, and differs considerably from Laima Eglīte's interpretation of the same scene.

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Jackson also solves the problem of the glaring discrepancy between Legolas, the Elvenking's son, and his father, as depicted e.g. by Rankin & Bass or Eglïte. Ever since the publication of the animated movies *The Hobbit* (Rankin & Bass 1977) and *The Lord of the Rings* (Bakshi 1978), people commented on the contrast between the goblin-like Elvenking in the Rankin & Bass version and the traditionally handsome beach-boy type Legolas in Ralph Bakshi's movie – which has been a source of scathing humour for decades and led to the creation of memes such as »Apparently, Legolas gets his looks from his mother …« (Merides 2009, online).

Fig. 6: Rhiannon riding in Arbeth (Mabinogion 1877)

One point that is important in the depiction of the Wood-elves, and especially of the royal underground palace, is the connection forged to the Celtic *sidhe*. The term *sidhe* originally denotes the earthen mounds which are, according to Irish folklore and mythology, the homes of the *aos sí*,[27] the People of the Mounds, who are often associated with or identified as elves and fairies. Tolkien himself strengthened the *sidhe* connection not only through his description of the royal underground palace, but also by means of his drawing 'The Elvenking's Gate' (cf. Tolkien Gateway 2010, online) as an illustration for the first edition of *The Hobbit*. The black-and-white picture

27 The older form of *aos sí* is *aes sídhe*, and thus *sídhe* is often used to refer to both the mounds and their inhabitants.

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shows a tree-lined pathway running straight up to a monolithic entrance to a hill on the other side of a river. This *sidhe* connection is important for the visualisation of the Elves since it links them to the Celtic myths and legends, which became widely popular thanks to Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of *The Mabinogion* (1838–1845). Already the first edition was lavishly illustrated and presented the inhabitants of the Otherworld as normal-sized men and women in standard Victorian medievalising dress.

These tales, as well as their illustrations, would provide inspiration for many 19th-century artists, not least the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was founded in 1848. Their way of visualising motifs and scenes from history, literature, religion, legend, and myth proved highly influential for generations and marked the ennoblement and transformation of the hitherto popular folktale motifs to suit the aesthetic sensibilities of the cultural elite. As a consequence, the fairies and elves of folklore grew up, both literally and culturally, and became part of high culture. It is this tradition that gives us elves at once alluring and somewhat frightening or, to use Rudolf Otto's terminology, *tremendum et fascinans*.[28] Had we to select one particular painting to illustrate this new development, I would opt for John Duncan's (1866–1945) *The Riders of the Sidhe* from 1911 (Robertson 2022, online).

Fig. 7: The Riders of the Sidhe (1911) by John Duncan

We don't know whether Tolkien ever saw this particular picture, but it can be seen as representative of the entire 'new' tradition of visualising the denizens of Faërie,

28 Otto coined these terms in his study *Das Heilige* (1917).

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providing an alternative to the diminutive flower fairies of Shakespeare and Drayton.

We could summarise the development in Tolkien's work in his own words, as quoted by Douglas Anderson, who writes: »Tolkien concluded the paper [on the poet Francis Thompson, March 1914] (according to the club's secretary) with the observation, 'One must begin with the elfin and delicate and progress to the profound: listed [sic] first to the violin and the flute, and then learn to hearken to the organ of being's harmony.'« (*AnHob* 205, note 9). And that is what Tolkien does: he progresses from the ubiquitous Victorian flower fairies to the noble inhabitants of the Otherworld as found in *The Mabinogion* – a development that becomes more explicit with the change of genre from children's tale (*The Hobbit*) to adult epic (*The Lord of the Rings*). Whilst the darker and more ominous elements in *The Hobbit* could be seen as 'intrusions' from a different tradition, *The Lord of the Rings* is soon embracing this 'tradition', and we are moving on from the flute and the violin to the organ.

4. »They were a race high and beautiful [...]« (Tolkien 2004: 1137, Appendix F): Elves in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Nowadays the Elves of *The Lord of the Rings* are no longer in danger of being confused with their diminutive winged Victorian cousins twice removed. The very first encounters with members of the Quendi, such as the hobbits' meeting with Gildor Inglorion in the Shire or later with Glorfindel, suggest a noble, wise, and somewhat remote people. Again, detailed descriptions of their concrete appearance are missing, and the image created in the mind of the readers is based on allusions and indirect references. It is only at the Council of Elrond that an Elvish protagonist comes into focus. Legolas, the son of King Thranduil of *The Hobbit* fame is selected to represent the Elves within the Fellowship (Tolkien 2004: 275). Although we have now a permanent presence of an Elf in the narrative, the information about his appearance remains sparse. All we get is a very general description on the occasion of his introduction at the Council of Elrond. The narrator briefly sketches the different people who have gathered at Elrond's home, and in this context Legolas, too, is mentioned: »There was also a strange Elf clad in green and brown, Legolas, a messenger from his father, Thranduil, the King of the Elves of Northern Mirkwood« (Tolkien 2004: 240). Later, we get to know that he had a »fair Elvish face« (Tolkien 2004: 255) and was equipped with »a bow and a quiver, and at his belt a long white knife« (Tolkien 2004: 279). Indeed, bow and arrow seem to be his weapons of choice, and he uses them to great effect in the fights and battles to come. His martial skills and woodcraft are aided by his keen eyesight (cf. Tolkien 2004: 281 and 423), his light tread (cf. Tolkien 2004: 292, 312, and 429), and the Elvish ability of »resting his mind in the strange paths of Elvish dreams, even as he walked open-eyed in the light of this

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world« (Tolkien 2004: 429; cf. also Tolkien 2004: 442). More helpful are comparisons such as »Legolas was standing, gazing northwards into the darkness, thoughtful and silent as a young tree in a windless night« (Tolkien 2004: 426)[29] or details about his physiology mentioned in passing: »But Legolas stood beside him, shading his bright elven-eyes with his long slender hand« (Tolkien 2004: 430). We thus get the impression of a slim, light-footed, yet strong and energetic Elf – an impression that is validated by the Rohirrim's choice of steed to carry both Legolas and Gimli. They give him a »smaller and lighter horse, but restive and fiery« (Tolkien 2004: 439) which he rides without saddle or bridle. All these elements do not constitute a full description in the *effictio* tradition and are rather indebted to the *notatio* tradition,[30] yet they suffice to suggest a certain type. Interestingly, before Peter Jackson's first movie trilogy, most illustrators of *The Lord of the Rings* were reluctant to portray Legolas. The earliest prominent visualisation occurs within the context of Ralph Bakshi's animated movie (1978). Bakshi opts for a cleanshaven, blonde, grey-eyed beach-boy type of beauty. Bakshi's Legolas is as tall as Aragorn but with a slender build, and his pointed ears are hidden most of the time by his hair.[31] All in all, Bakshi's Elf keeps close enough to what we find in the original text, but he fails to become the paradigmatic model for later artists. Inger Edelfeldt's depiction of Legolas in the 1985 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar (cf. The One Ring b, online), for example, differs considerably. Her Legolas is dark-haired, and his general appearance is reminiscent of an Asian warrior rather than of a Californian beach boy.

I expected to strike gold and find the paradigmatic Elvish warrior-prince in all his glory in the 1992 centenary[32] edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, which had been beautifully illustrated by Alan Lee. The result was, on the one hand, somewhat disappointing but, on the other, in tune with Tolkien's handling of the Elves. They are there in Lee's atmospheric illustrations yet not so much centre stage but blending into the

29 The young tree image occurs also in the slightly more detailed description of Legolas in a comment by Tolkien in reaction to »'pretty' or 'ladylike' rendering[s] of Legolas: 'He was tall as a young tree, lithe, immensely strong, able swiftly to draw a great war-bow and shoot down a Nazgûl, endowed with the tremendous vitality of Elvish bodies, so hard and resistant to hurt that he went only in light shoes over rock or through snow, the most tireless of all the Fellowship.'« (Tolkien 1992a: 327).

30 *Effictio* is a largely standardised description of a person's (typically a woman's) appearance from head to toe. An example can be found in the chapter 'Amplification and Abbreviation' (pp. 36–37) in Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* (ca. 1210). *Notatio* is a largely standardised description of a person's (typically a man's) character by means of his virtues and qualities. An example can be found in Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria* (ca. 1175, p. 66).

31 See, for example, the 'group picture' of the Fellowship (cf. u/elfocuro 2022, online).

32 'Centenary' here refers to Tolkien's 100th birthday. He was born 3 January 1892.

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surroundings and therefore often almost invisible to the casual observer.[33] Elves feature for the first time prominently in the watercolour depicting the hobbits' meeting with Gildor Inglorion and his companions in the Shire (Tolkien 1992b: 96/97).[34] There we get a good and unobstructed look at (presumably) Gildor and some of his fellow Elves, both male and female. They all wear flat shoes (not boots!), leggings-type trousers, and tight-fitting, long-armed tunics over which they don a cloak. They are all beardless and have long fair hair that falls in strands (maybe even small braids?) over their shoulders. Lee also makes a point of showing clearly two of their ears: they are not pointed (nor are those of the hobbits)![35] Later paintings for the volume show mostly Legolas, who fits the mould established by Gildor and his companions.[36] Thus, we first encounter Thranduil's son in the illustration depicting the Council of Elrond (Tolkien 1992b: 272/273). There we see a beardless, slim Elf with light brown hair facing a seated, bearded Elrond who seems of heavier build. This impression is further supported by the picture showing the Fellowship in front of the Doors of Moria (Tolkien 1992b: 320/321). Legolas is standing next to Boromir, and he is somewhat shorter than the Gondorian, which is in accordance with Tolkien's text. The style of Lee's illustrations shows strong influences from the British artist Arthur Rackham (1867–1939), whose paintings of e.g. Wagner's *Ring* cycle proved influential and whom Tolkien knew and appreciated. Lee, like Tolkien, progressed in his artistic career from the diminutive sprites that haunt the British countryside to the noble inhabitants of the Otherworld.[37] Yet Lee gives us already in the 1978 volume *Fairies* (illustrated together with Brian Froud) not only the Victorian flower fairies, but also the more disturbing creatures that populate the realm of Faërie, such as spriggans, leprechauns, goblins etc. Most importantly, he also includes illustrations in the style of those found in *The Mabinogion*, with its mythological characters similar to the Gaelic Daoine Sidhe. Thus, Froud and Lee's illustrations for *Fairies* (1978), together with Lee's watercolours for the 1982 edition of *The Mabinogion*, provide the imaginative foundation for Lee's visualisations of Tolkien's work. On the one hand, the goblins and other menacing sprites of British folklore are the direct ancestors of

33 This is also true for the few instances where we have Elves in the illustrations of the 1997 edition of *The Hobbit*. See the Elves swimming in the Loudwater or resting on the banks of the river in Lee's illustration (Tolkien 1997: 49/50).

34 The illustrations in the 1992 edition are not included in the pagination, so I indicate their place by giving the numbers of the adjoining pages. 96/97 in this case means that the illustration can be found between pages 96 and 97. Alternatively, the painting can be accessed at (The One Ring a, online).

35 The ears of Lee's goblins and orcs, however, are clearly pointed.

36 See also the picture showing the 'Three Hunters' (Tolkien 1992b: 448/449) where we see Legolas depicted from behind.

37 See Honegger (2023b) for an in-depth discussion of Alan Lee's role in the development of the *Albus Jacsonensis*.

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his goblins and orcs as found in Lee's illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings* (1992) and *The Hobbit* (1997), whereas, on the other hand, the Daoine Sidhe inspired his depiction of Tolkien's Elves.

Ever since the 1980s, Lee's vision of Tolkien's Elves gently influenced the way generations of readers visualised Legolas and the other Fair People, yet it was never the sole or even the dominant type. This changed when Alan Lee and John Howe became chief conceptual designers for Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy. Howe's fame was based on his illustrations for book covers (e.g. the iconic Gandalf) or board games. However, elves had not featured prominently in his work, apart from a few specimens on covers and arguably one Elf in his depiction of the Battle of the Five Armies.[38] His one known rendition of Legolas occurs in 'Legolas and Gimli at Helm's Deep' from the 2001 *Tolkien Calendar* (cf. Howe 2002, online). The picture was painted in 1999, so during the time when he was working for Peter Jackson, and although it shows Legolas almost in full, we see very little of his face since he wears a helmet and full body armour.[39] Consequently, we can merely establish that he has long blonde hair and no beard, so it seems that Jackson's Elves are based mainly on Alan Lee's paintings. In the case of Legolas, we can argue that Jackson's version is basically Alan Lee's visualisation of the Wood-elven prince rendered in HD.[40]

Jackson's Elves become so successful because they take up some older elements, refining and adapting them to fill a gap in the visual tradition. As a consequence, they become the hegemonic model for how to envisage the non-diminutive inhabitants of Faërie and provide the starting point from which further developments take place. While Jackson's *The Hobbit* (2012–2014) movie trilogy, on the one hand, reinforced the hegemonic picture of the blonde, blue/grey eyed, fair-skinned, slim, martially skilled Elf, it also, on the other hand, opened the door for variations of this basic pattern, most prominently in the form of the red-haired female Wood-elf Tauriel. Jackson had already tried to counterbalance the numeral predominance of male protagonists in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* by upgrading Arwen in his first movie trilogy. However, Arwen, as the daughter of Elrond Half-elven and the granddaughter of Galadriel, has never been intended as representative of the 'average Elf' – she has always been too much in a category of her own. The introduction of a newly invented female Elf character was thus merely a logical step towards a greater gender parity. And to make her a redhead earned Jackson some more brownie points on the

38 The Elf can be found in the pop-up version of *The Hobbit* (Tolkien 1999, last pop-up page, right-hand corner). Other Elves appear, e.g., on the cover of *Elf Fantastic* (1997), edited by Martin H. Greenberg.

39 Howe, as a re-enactment player and specialist in all questions of medieval and early modern armour, is likely to have influenced the realisation of Elvish armour.

40 Lee's ethereal Elves still survive in Jackson's movies in the first encounter of the hobbits with the Elves riding towards the Grey Havens and, of course, in the presentation of Lothlórien and its inhabitants.

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inclusion scale. This trajectory has been followed and developed by video-game and Fantasy artists, so that the Amazon Prime series *The Rings of Power* (2022-) features Elves and other protagonists with an obviously non-white Caucasian background, most prominently the Elf Arondir (played by Ismael Cruz Córdova). Additionally, we see a differentiation by means of hairstyles. The long-haired Elf-lords such as Gilgalad (Mark Ferguson) or the she-Elves such as Galadriel (Morfydd Clark) are contrasted with short-haired Elves, such as military-style Arondir or the 1950s blow-dry style Elrond (Robert Aramayo) and Celebrimbor (Charles Edwards). We haven't seen an Elf with a beard or a moustache yet, but since Círdan the Shipwright sports a beard,[41] I am preparing myself mentally to possibly encounter a hipster-style Elf in the next season of *The Rings of Power*.

Depending on one's point of view, these new variations and deviations from the hegemonic *Albus Jacsonensis* have been either heavily criticised as a woke aberration or welcomed as part of the adaptation of Tolkien's legendarium for a 21st-century audience.[42] Tolkien himself did not visualise any of his Elves with an African or Oriental ethnical background – primarily because he based his legendarium largely on the cultural heritage of north-western Europe.[43] Yet this does not exclude variation (cf. Shippey 2005). As we have seen, Círdan breaks the mould of the beardless Elf, and we have enigmatic figures such as Eöl the Dark Elf,[44] whose name is suggestive, though, it is unlikely that Tolkien did envisage him as an 'Elf of Colour'.

5. »[…] a Lady in the Golden Wood, as old tales tell!« (Tolkien 2004: 432): Galadriel, the Lady of Lothlórien

Galadriel is probably the most iconic female figure from *The Lord of the Rings*. She has featured prominently in Tolkien-related publications, such as the various Tolkien Calendars, from a very early date.[45] She is also one of the protagonists who is de-

41 »As they came to the gates Círdan the Shipwright came forth to greet them. Very tall he was, and his beard was long, and he was grey and old, save that his eyes were keen as stars; and he looked at them and bowed, and said: 'All is now ready.'« (Tolkien 2004: 1030).

42 See Stuart (2022) for an excellent study of race and racism in Tolkien's works.

43 See Honegger (forthcoming) on the possible Oriental origin of the 'little people' (aka fairies) in the context of the Turanian-origin theory.

44 He features in chapter 16 'Of Maeglin' of the 'Quenta Silmarillion' (Tolkien 1977: 131–139). The epithet 'Dark Elf' seems to refer to his choice of dwelling place in the darkest place of the forest of Nan Emloth and his predilection for the night and the stars rather than the sunlight and is not likely to suggest an 'ethnic' background since he is »of the kin of Thingol« (Tolkien 1977: 132).

45 See, for example, 'Galadriel' by Tim Kirk (1975 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'The Ring of Galadriel' by the Brothers Hildebrandt (1976 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'The Gift of Galadriel' by the Brothers Hildebrandt (1978 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'Galadriel

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picted consistently as a tall, golden-haired, fair-skinned lady dressed in white. This uniformity in the visualisation has its roots most likely in the equally consistent characterisation in Tolkien's text. Thus, she is first introduced to the reader when the surviving members of the Fellowship come to Lothlórien and are greeted by Galadriel and Celeborn:

> Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord; and they were grave and beautiful. They were clad wholly in white; and the hair of the Lady was of deep gold, and the hair of the Lord Celeborn was of silver long and bright; but no sign of age was upon them, unless it were in the depths of their eyes; for these were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory. (Tolkien 2004: 354)

This impression is further strengthened by various references that compound the image of a tall woman in white.[46] Yet while the outer appearance seems clearly fixed, the impact she has on the different members of the Fellowship may vary. Sam, for example, when trying to describe Galadriel to Faramir, gives the following characterisation:

> Beautiful she is, sir! Lovely! Sometimes like a great tree in flower, sometimes like a white daffadowndilly, small and slender like. Hard as di'monds, soft as moonlight. Warm as sunlight, cold as frost in the stars. Proud and far-off as a snow-mountain, and as merry as any lass I ever saw with daisies in her hair in springtime. But that's a lot o' nonsense, and all wide of my mark. (Tolkien 2004: 680)

This is about as close as Sam will ever get to Petrarchan love-poetry with its paradoxical elements, and it is not 'wide of the mark' at all. Sam's words capture some of the paradoxical nature of the Good People itself, who appear at times enticingly beautiful or cute, at others sublime and even threatening. And the link to the Petrarchan tradition points also in the direction of another important element in the visualisation of Galadriel: that of the *domna*, the courtly lady of the troubadour tradition, which is actualised in the courtly relationship between Gimli and Galadriel.[47]

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and Celeborn' by Rowena Morrill (1981 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'The Mirror of Galadriel' by John Howe (1991 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), 'The Mirror of Galadriel' by Alan Lee (1993 Ballantine Books Tolkien Calendar), and 'Lady Galadriel' by Ted Nasmith (2002 HarperCollins Tolkien Calendar).

46 See, for example: »Tall and white and fair she walked beneath the trees. […] and the Elf-lady beside him was tall and pale.« (Tolkien 2004: 361) or »In the midst of the vessel sat Celeborn, and behind him stood Galadriel, tall and white; a circlet of golden flowers was in her hair, and in her hand she held a harp, and she sang.« (Tolkien 2004: 372).

47 See Honegger (2023a: 184f.) for a possible interpretation of the relationship between Gimli and Galadriel within the framework of courtly love.

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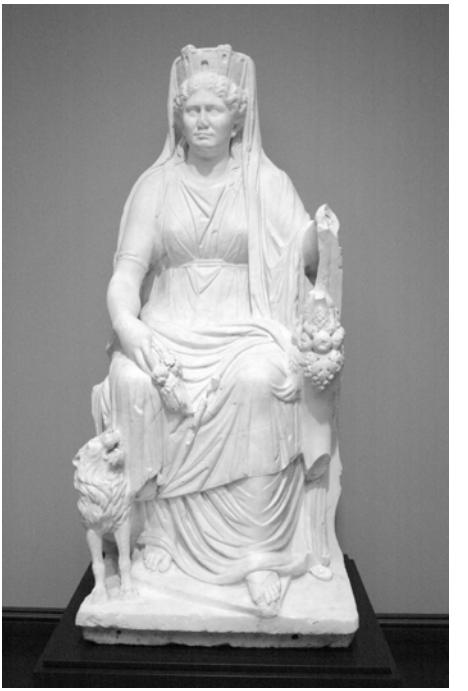
Linked to this is the veneration of the Virgin Mary, and indeed Tolkien himself made the connection between Mary and Galadriel (Tolkien 2000: 288).[48] The Catholic element is important because it alerts us to the potential influence of the numerous paintings, statues, stained glass windows etc. depicting the Virgin Mary and other female saints.[49] This then links Galadriel to the 'Weisse Frauen'[50] of the Germanic tradition who, in turn are part of the White Goddess archetype.[51]

Fig. 8: Statue of a Seated Cybele with the Portrait Head of her Priestess (AD 50)



48 Tolkien also sees Elbereth as a kind of Virgin Mary figure, which has been analysed in depth by Kowalik (2013).

49 One of the origin stories about the fairies/elves links them to the Luciferian rebellion in Heaven. They are, according to this tradition, those angels who tried to remain neutral in the conflict between God and Lucifer, and who were then exiled onto earth. See Sugg (2018: 20–30). Eventually occurring similarities of the Elves to the angels as represented in the iconography of the Catholic church are therefore not completely unfounded.

50 See Grimm (1992, II: 803–809).

51 See Graves's classical study *The White Goddess* (first edition 1948; expanded edition 1966).

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As a consequence, Galadriel may be seen as the primary embodiment of female Elvendom, yet she is at least as much the living archetype of the White Goddess and, as such, transcends her role as female Elf. Consequently, the internal economy of modern movie narratives aims to counterbalance this by filling the gap in the matrix for the 'average female Elf' by bolstering the role of existing female Elves, such as Arwen, or even inventing less exalted ones, such as Tauriel.

The Rings of Power series, by contrast, faces the challenge of presenting an approachable young Galadriel who has not yet achieved the exalted status of White Goddess. The resulting persona keeps the outer appearance of Galadriel as established by Tolkien and most of the artists and movie makers since Tim Kirk, yet her status suffers a radical downsizing to that of a heroic 'human' military leader, and the White Goddess persona does not play a role (yet). As such, the young Galadriel (Morfydd Clark) can be seen as a more typical representative of female Elvendom than her older self (Cate Blanchett).

6. Conclusion

Fig. 9: The Fall of the Angels

The appearance of the fairies, elves, and other sprites in Victorian art and literature constitutes a mere fraction of their history which is said to have its origin in the time before the creation of the Earth. Within the framework of »the great heresy

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of fairyland« (Sugg 2018: 25), the denizens of Faërie have been interpreted as fallen angels who had tried to remain neutral in the conflict between God and Lucifer.

As a result, they had been exiled from Heaven to Earth where they dwindled and lost their original aspect. Within this framework, the flower fairies of the Victorian era and their less cute but equally diminutive cousins are angelic exiles and their descendants. This late stage of the imaginary of the elves and fairies dominated illustrations, paintings, dramatic and musical performances on stage, and even photography and early film[52] and thus provided the original setting for Tolkien's Elves. The story of the visualisation of the elves in the 20th and 21st centuries is, as I have shown in the preceding paragraphs, intimately linked with the development of Tolkien's legendarium and the role of the Eldar. While Tolkien's earliest known poems like 'Wood-sunshine' (1910) still feature woodland sprites that are indebted to the Victorian tradition, we soon notice that Tolkien, with the rise of the Eldar, reaches back to an alternative tradition of the human-sized denizens of Faërie. Echoes of the co-existence of the two concepts are still to be found in e.g. Tolkien's description of the Elves of Rivendell in the children's tale *The Hobbit* (1937), yet he was aware that he had to distinguish between the different categories of (super)natural beings and, eventually, to get rid of the flower fairy element. He did so, for example, in the third chapter of *The Book of Lost Tales 1* when describing 'The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor':

> About them [the Valar] fared a great host who are the sprites of trees and woods, of dale and forest and mountain-side, or those that sing amid the grass at morning and chant among the standing corn at eve. These are the Nermir and the Tavari, Nandini and Orossi, brownies, fays, pixies, leprawns, and what else are they not called, for their number is very great: yet must they not be confused with the Eldar, […]. (Tolkien 1994: 66)

Indeed, they must not be confused with the Eldar, and it can be argued that the modern differentiation between the human-sized Elves and the lesser sprites of the countryside is due to the popularity of Tolkien's work. Without the success of *The Lord of the Rings* both as a text and as a movie trilogy, the image of the Elf might be still indebted to the flower fairy tradition. Other authors would and actually did come up with concepts of Elves that differ radically from the Victorian tradition and are closer to Tolkien's Eldar, such as the elves in Poul Anderson's novel *The Broken Sword*, which was published on 5 November 1954, just three months after *The Fellowship of the Ring* (29 July 1954). Yet despite the critical acclaim for Anderson's novel, it was never able to rival the popular success of Tolkien's epic and consequently Anderson's depiction

52 See the photographs of the famous Cottingley fairies and the Cabbage fairy of the early film *La fée aux choux* (1896) by Alice Guy (running time: 1 minute).

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of the elves never gained sufficient influence to challenge the noble Eldar of Middle-earth. Looking back at the development of the Elves from flower fairy to the *Albus Jacsonensis* and beyond, I sometimes wonder what would have happened if Tolkien had never published his epic tale. But as it is, chance favoured his conception of the denizens of Faërie, »if chance you call it« (Tolkien 2004: 126).

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Fig. 7: Statue of a Seated Cybele with the Portrait Head of her Priestess, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cybele_Getty_Villa_57.AA.19.jpg [accessed: 9 February 2024]. Getty Villa, CC BY-SA 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons.

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Fig. 9: Fall of the Angels. Michael casts out rebel angels. Illustration by Gustave Doré for John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 1866 (Book VI Lines 874 875). Available online: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paradise_Lost_1.jpg [accessed: 9 February 2024]. Gustave Doré, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

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Visualizing the Never-Seen

Models of Time, Space and History in Fantasy Cartography

Judith Klinger

Maps belong to Fantasy literature more than any other genre, as Diana Wynne Jones points out satirically in *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*: »Find the map. It will be there. No Tour of Fantasyland is complete without one« (Jones 1996: 1).[1] Maps depicting Fantasy realms help to shape imaginary spaces, which cannot be explored or experienced outside the book and the map. Unlike maps aiming to represent geographical formations or political structures of the past, Fantasy maps spatialize universes that are not (or not in all aspects) bound to the same configurations of space and time as the extra-literary world.[2] In George Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* this is evidenced by a temporal expansion and spatialization of seasons. In his seven *Narnia* books, C. S. Lewis introduces a parallel world where time passes differently – in fact a multiverse. And J. R. R. Tolkien's Arda cosmos features zones of heterotemporality and heterospatiality, which shift with the succession of different eras.

The cartographic visualization of other worlds has clearly become one of the paratextual conventions of Fantasy literature. In the terms of Gérard Genette's functional model of paratextuality, these maps operate on the threshold between the book and the exterior world, leading readers into the »thicket of the work's margins« (Nitsche 2001: 388) and out on the other side.[3] Since one of their functions is to offer readers spatial orientation and context, in interaction with the narrated

1 The sample surveyed by Ekman 2013: 22–24, based on 200 Fantasy novels, showed that 27 to 40 percent of the examined books featured maps. This does not, however, invalidate the close connection between the map and the narrative genre; cf. Bushell 2020: 199: »the map is endemic to the point of redundancy for this genre (as it is not for any other)«.

2 Sundmark 2017: 223 describes, on this basis, a tension between the supposed realism of the cartographic medium and Fantasy as a genre that creates its own worlds. For the construction of thresholds and boundaries see Ekman 2013: 68–128.

3 According to Genette 1997: 2, the paratext is »a ›vestibule‹ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an ›undefined zone‹ between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text),« yet it still controls readings of the text.

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story, Fantasy maps draw on different cartographic conventions and employ established two-dimensional models for systematizing and symbolizing spaces. In this manner, they act as transmission zones between pre-existing models of time and space and cartographic conventions on the one hand and the (partial) spatio-temporal alterity of Fantasy universes on the other. Even beyond the narrated world and the book, they can inspire viewers to imagine other spatialities.[4] Fantasy maps thus shape a very distinct liminal zone, characterized by a *transitionality* between divergent constructs of space and time, which yet awaits systematical description. The maps' textual references and their functions for the reception process are an integral part of this complex; my paper will however focus on the principles and strategies of visual representation, and the fundamental tension inherent in Fantasy cartography. While Fantasy maps draw on conventional ways of modelling measurable spaces, they also introduce spatialities that can point beyond the familiar representations of geographical structures and challenge perceptional habits.[5] Based on this observation, I propose that incoherencies and ruptures within historical patterns of representation, along with their complexity and hybridity, could prove to be constitutive features of Fantasy maps – albeit with different characteristics in each specific case.

I will start out by examining the tensions discernible in Tolkien's maps of Middle-earth. The second section of this paper explores how the semiotic systems of historically different cartographies are combined and modified within the map of Middle-earth, the map for C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, drawn by Pauline Baynes, and some of the maps that accompany George Martin's unfinished series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The third and final section then focuses on the serialization and transformation of these maps and considers examples that cross media boundaries.

4 Bushell 2020: 228–236, describes how maps have become independent of the books and cites the secondary cartography (»post-authorial maps and atlases«) that followed Tolkien's publications as an example. Further on this aspect see Danielson 2018, esp. 7–11, on »fan cartography«.

5 Mendlesohn 2008: 14, in particular has emphasized that Fantasy maps help to consolidate the narrated history: »portal-quest fantasies reconstruct history in the mode of the Scholastics, and recruit cartography to provide a fixed narrative, in a palpable failure to understand the fictive and imaginative nature of the discipline of history«. See Ekman's overview of studies on this topic (2013: 15–19). For a critical view on Mendlesohn see Bushell 2020: 201f.: her study of Tolkien's integrated approach (which interlaces the writing process with the development of maps; ibid.: 206–220) aims at a dynamic understanding of the production of meaning with and through maps. For similar arguments see Tally 2016: 16; Timpf 2017.

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1. Tensions in the Cartography of Middle-earth

Tolkien's work on his literary texts was closely interwoven with the emergence of cartographic designs. *The History of Middle-earth*, edited by Christopher Tolkien in twelve volumes, contains a number of map sketches and drafts and thus offers a variety of insights into the creation process. More recently, exhibitions in Oxford and Milwaukee[6] have given prominence to literary cartography, lending additional visibility to these interconnections. Tolkien's papers provide ample evidence of the way maps served as starting points for the narrative, helped to consolidate individual scenes and provided orientation for the author himself. They frequently show regional or local details[7] or appear as small sketches in the middle of text segments, as continuations of the narration by different means.[8] On 25 April 1954 Tolkien wrote to copy-editor Naomi Mitchison: »I wisely started with a map, and made the story fit (generally with meticulous care for distances)« (Tolkien 1995: 177, letter 144).[9] It is obvious, however, that the process was not so much governed by linear sequence (the drawing of a map followed by story-writing), but involved reciprocal modifications and developments. Clear evidence emerges from manuscript pages that show cartographic sketches embedded in the text and interwoven with its genesis.[10] Maps were part of the story's evolution and – like the text – underwent modifications, revisions and expansions.

An »integrated model of writing and mapping« (Bushell 2020: 202) underlies the geography of Middle-earth in *The Lord of the Rings*: narrative exploration of the geography went hand in hand with continuous additions and revisions to the general

6 The exhibition at Oxford's Bodleian Library, *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth* (2018), was subsequently shown in Paris. In 2022, Marquette University in Milwaukee presented *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Art of the Manuscript*. The accompanying publications (McIlwaine 2018 and Fliss/Schaefer 2022) supplement the maps' reproductions with information and comments on Tolkien's literary cartography. For further introductions see also Campbell 2007; Fliss 2022; Hammond/Scull 2022.

7 See McIlwaine 2018 for sketches of the Crossroads (387, Fig. 174) or the areas around Minas Tirith and Osgiliath (389, Fig. 175) in addition to maps of larger regions.

8 See the manuscript pages published in Fliss/Schaefer 2022 featuring sketches of Minas Tirith (160, Fig. 121), Stonewain Valley/Minas Tirith (161, Fig. 122) and the map sketch of Rohan, Gondor and Mordor in McIlwaine 2018, 402f. (Fig. 181).

9 In a letter to Allen & Unwin on 9 October 1953 (letter 141), Tolkien describes the difficulties he faced while producing the maps: »The Maps. I am stumped. Indeed in a panic. They are essential; and urgent; but I just cannot get them done. I have spent an enormous amount of time on them without profitable result. Lack of skill combined with being harried« (Tolkien 1995: 171).

10 Cf. Bushell 2020: 218–220 (Fig. 6.9), referring to Tolkien's sketch of the summit of Mindolluin and Minas Tirith.

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›working map‹ of Middle-earth.[11] The large composite map shows multiple traces of the production process, ranging from annotations that were crossed out or erased to the area around Rohan, where a whole section was pasted over. In its palimpsest-like materiality, the map reveals – more clearly than the cleaned-up, subsequently printed version – the intense attention given to every detail as well as uncertainties, fluctuations and a peculiar openness to the perception of the drafted spaces. For Tolkien, everything from sketches and drafts to the large-format general map served to spatialize the interlaced plot lines. His ostensible aim was to present a comprehensible, true-to-scale depiction of the routes travelled (in line with his »meticulous care for distances«), embedded in the landscapes that his characters traverse. Yet the cartographic approaches to the world of Middle-earth are by no means limited to this function.

The publication of not one but three maps employing divergent visual and semiotic codes, highlights that the maps in *The Lord of the Rings* eschew a single, coherent representation of the space described in the narrative. From the now well-known ›general map of Middle-earth‹,[12] drawn by Christopher Tolkien in 1953, to a map showing »A Part of the Shire«, placed between the Prologue and the first chapter of the first volume (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 1954), and an additional isoline map of Rohan and Gondor inserted at the end of the third volume (*The Return of the King*, 1955), the differences are easily visible. The principles of representation employed in the two supplementary maps, magnifying areas of particular importance, vary significantly – and both again differ from the general map's visual patterns.[13] Even at a brief glance, the juxtaposition of the three maps reveals a multiperspectivity, due to different visualization strategies, that invites readers to compare or combine the mapped spaces, or to shift them, by turns, into the focus of attention during the reading process. Yet the topography and toponymy[14] of Middle-earth continued to evolve even after the novels were first published. From the late 1960s survives a map of Middle-earth with comments and additions by Tolkien and illustrator Pauline Baynes, intended as amendments to the published map.[15] A revision process that

11 Reproduced and documented in McIlwaine 2018: 398f. (Fig. 179, also reproduced on the book's front and back pastedowns and the free endpapers); for the development of the general map see Tolkien 1989: 295–323; for the ›working map‹ see Tolkien 1990: 433–439.

12 Tolkien himself used this term several times in his correspondence (Tolkien 1995: 168, 177, 210, 247).

13 For a detailed discussion of the Shire map see Ekman 2013: 44–55; on the combination of the three maps see Bushell 2020: 223–225.

14 On the importance of toponymy for the construction of Fantasy worlds see Algeo 1985: 80–82; for the linguistic principles behind the construction of place names in Tolkien's work see ibid.: 83–94.

15 See McIlwaine 2018: 382f. (Fig. 172). The Tolkien Society has published Baynes's and Tolkien's comments, transcribed by Susan Theobald (cf. Theobald, online)

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extended over decades finally culminated in the general map of 1980, with additions and modifications executed by Christopher Tolkien, which has been published in all subsequent editions of *The Lord of the Rings* (Fig. 1). I will examine this map's key principles of representation below.

Fig. 1: ›The West of Middle-earth at the End of the Third Age‹, drawn by Christopher Tolkien, 1980

Given Tolkien's expressed interest in a plausible relationship between plot sequences and distances, it is not surprising that the topographic map adheres to established conventions of indicating scale, with a scale bar giving distances in miles. Unlike historical maps, whose legends sometimes contain several alternative systems of measurement (cf. Fig. 9), a single, overriding norm is applied here.

This arrangement suggests a traceability of the characters' journeys, consistent with extra-literary conceptions of space.[16] At the same time, the general map of Middle-earth is a complex composite sign system, as indicated by the two-coloured (black and red) combination of pictorial elements and labels. In more precise terms,

16 See Ekman 2013: 35: »the scale on the fictional map announces that there is another space to which the map positions correspond, strengthening the impression that the map not only portrays but represents, that there is a measurable space to which the map refers«.

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the »composite sign system of the map«, as described by Robert Stockhammer, generates »an *iconic* illusion, is dominated by an *indexological* function, but is based, not least, on *symbolic* signs« (Stockhammer 2007: 50).[17] In cartography, the ›iconic illusion‹ – that is, the notion of a *similarity* between the map and the spaces it represents – is always achieved by strategies of generalization, including »selection, simplification, elimination, smoothing over, typification« (Schlögel 2003: 101). On closer inspection, the map of Middle-earth does not follow a single coherent mode of selection, but rather reveals a layering of different principles.

The map's fragmentary status is obvious even at first glance: neither does it encompass the entirety of Middle-earth, nor are the contained regions shown with the same level of detail.[18] In the revised version of 1980, this is underlined by the title »The West of Middle-earth at the End of the Third Age«, denoting both spatial and temporal limitations. In contrast to the superabundance of places, regions and labels in the Westlands, i.e. in the northwest, large blank areas and unlabelled tracts of land are noticeable elsewhere, particularly in the south and east. Only on the surface can this imbalance be linked to the journeys described in the narrative. While some regions not visited by the characters remain blank, many other equally untravelled areas are labelled with great precision, particularly in the northwestern section of the map. Ricardo Padrón suggests that the unlabelled *terrae incognitae* invite imaginary exploration (Padrón 2007: 272); above all, however, they emphasize the limits of cartography and signal an opening towards the unknown.[19]

In contrast to these empty spaces and blanks, the northwest of Middle-earth is densely labelled and rendered accessible in much pictorial detail – even in areas where no narrated action occurs. In many places, the map also features locations and regions of historical significance, such as the extensively labelled area in the upper northwestern quadrant, identified as »the lost realm of Arnor«: the kingdom of the Dúnedain, which ceased to exist long before the story picks up. Another long-lost kingdom included on the map (albeit one ruled by the opposing party) is Angmar, with its capital Carn Dûm in the far north: the domain of the ›Witch-king‹

17 Charles Sanders Peirce defines the referenced semiotic terms as follows: while the icon is based on a perceived similarity between the sign and the referent, the index indicates an actual connection. The symbol, in contrast, is an arbitrary, conventionalized sign (see Peirce 1903/2016).

18 The process of reduction becomes sharply visible if we compare the detailed ›working map‹ with the published map. Christopher Tolkien undertook the selection process his father struggled with, as expressed in a letter to Allen & Unwin on 9 October 1953: »I could do maps suitable to the text. It is the attempt to cut them down and omitting all their colour (verbal and otherwise) to reduce them to black and white bareness, on a scale so small that hardly any names can appear, that has stumped me« (Tolkien 1995: 171; letter 141). Cf. ibid.: 177.

19 Cf. Miller 2016: 134: »The ›blank spaces‹ offer the possibility that the world holds things as yet unexperienced, even unimagined.«

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and later lord of the nine Ringwraiths or Nazgûl. A third, less obvious example is situated north of Lórien, where the name »Gladden Fields« appears next to the confluence of two rivers: a momentous site in the history of the One Ring, as it was on this battlefield that Isildur lost the ring – allowing it to fall into Gollum's hands much later.[20]

The map's toponyms thus indicate historical events and contexts, linked with pictorial elements, ›natural‹ formations such as mountains and rivers, or markers of settlements. As a result, the *layered map* superimposes different but not precisely delimited eras and expands the narrated sequence of events. It lends temporal depth to the charted spaces, a depth also noticeable in the visual entanglement of toponyms.[21] The contrast between this excess and the map's fragmentary status can be addressed as a primary source of tension. At the same time, the historically significant sites and regions are not entirely absent from the story; a variety of references – from the characters' dialogues to the appendices of the *Lord of the Rings* – establish their place within the imagined world. Embedded in the map, they gain a phantom presence, implicitly suggesting that historical events may be spatially experienced: diachrony is translated into synchrony.

A more subtle trace of the distant past emerges from the bilingual toponymy. Throughout the map, the names of localities, regions and kingdoms are inscribed in both English (the language of the text) and Sindarin (the most common Elven language of Middle-earth). In many cases, an English translation accompanies the Sindarin toponym.[22] This combination both reflects and reduces the multiplicity of different languages, cultures and peoples that coexist in Middle-earth: clearly more than two in the narration. Yet this obvious reduction turns the toponymy into the readable trace of a settlement process, in the course of which Elven peoples, followed by human refugees from Númenor arrived in Middle-earth and established their own realms and cities. In contrast, names given only in English – especially in the Shire and the surrounding area – are associated with cultures based solely in Middle-earth and do not attest to previous migratory movements.

The map's strong emphasis on the west unlocks a further dimension of meaning. In addition to the dense weave of labels, a marked westward protrusion in the coastline stands out. And although the Western Sea serves as narrative setting on only one occasion, when Gandalf, Galadriel, Bilbo, Frodo and others embark on a westbound journey at the very end of *The Lord of the Rings*, the sea itself takes up a strikingly large

20 In the story, these events are introduced by Gandalf (Tolkien 1954/1955: 51); for a more detailed description see Tolkien 1980: 351–372 (*The Disaster of the Gladden Fields*).

21 Ekman 2013, 61, points out that the toponymy renders the historical dimension tangible via names preceded by ›Old‹.

22 Cf. »Ered Lithui/Ash Mountains« to the north of Mordor and the river »Gwathló/Greyflood«, to name just two examples.

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area. In addition, the west coast of Middle-earth exhibits a noteworthy opening at the »Gulf of Lhûn«, the location of the »Grey Havens«, from which the last Elven ships set sail. The map first published in 1954 even featured small drawings of ships by the Havens, a pictorial signal underlining the site's historical and mythological significance as well as the westward inclination of the landmass. The strong visual presence of the Great Western Sea (*Belegaer*) implicitly reverses the direction of the settlement history outlined above and instead points to the Elves' gradual disappearance from Middle-earth. Beyond the map, on the far side of the sea, lie the »Undying Lands« of Valinor and Tol Eressëa,[23] where the long-living Elves of the late Third Age still sail. On the one hand, the geographical opening towards the Western Sea indicates a connection to a mythical order of space. On the other, it suggests a fundamental ambivalence and a tension between history and myth, since Valinor could under no circumstances appear on this map, even if it included the far west.

Only Tolkien's *Ambarkanta* maps arrange Middle-earth and Valinor within a two-dimensional continuum.[24] These world maps, sketched in the 1930s, represent the First Age of Arda, before the catastrophic fall of Númenor led to the bending of the world into rounded shape.[25] In the Third Age, Valinor no longer exists on the same spatial plane as Middle-earth, and may only be reached across a mysterious ›straight road‹. As a result, the Undying Lands are situated beyond the boundaries of everything the two-dimensional map of Middle-earth (which represents a section of the round world after all) can depict. This representational limit informs the emphasis given to the coastline and the sea. Ricardo Padrón describes cartographic visualizations of Thomas More's *Utopia* as »emblems of our *desire* to know and possess that island, itself a symbol for the true, the beautiful, and the good« (Padrón 2007: 270). Similarly, the extent of Middle-earth's coastline with its protrusion into the Western Sea, may be read as an articulation of desire – albeit with a focus on the absence and

23 The western continent of Aman (with the inhabited region of Valinor) and the offshore island of Tol Eressëa occupy the position of an earthly paradise within the Arda cosmos as residence of the godlike Valar and the origin of all inner-worldly light. Only in very rare cases can this region be accessed by mortals.

24 This series of diagrams and map sketches, of which maps IV and V show the combination of Aman and Middle-earth, accompanies the cosmological text *Ambarkanta: The Shape of the World* (Tolkien 1986: 242–251).

25 The cataclysm of Númenor, an island between Middle-earth and Aman, occurs in the Second Age as a result of human hubris, incited by Sauron: when the settlers, already privileged by the Valar, prepare to conquer Valinor, their island is submerged by an enormous tidal wave. At the same time, the world changes its shape and becomes spherical. As a consequence, no route by which mortals can access Valinor remains. For the development of the material see Tolkien 1996: 140–165 (*The History of the Akallabêth*). Tolkien's tales of the fall of Númenor link the restructuring of the world to a radical change of episteme, from myth to history: cf. Klinger 2006.

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inaccessibility of the world of Valinor, which has become an epistemological problem in the course of Arda's history.

A final example may illustrate how the map intertwines mythological and symbolic dimensions. Sauron's realm of Mordor appears as an area enclosed by mountain ranges. In fact, their over-precise rectangular shape is disconcerting: here, the symbolism of fortified inaccessibility seems to have solidified into ›nature‹. This anomaly, argues Stefan Ekman, suggests that supernatural rather than tectonic forces have shaped the terrain (Ekman 2013: 57). Not only is Mordor the residence of evil, Sauron's presence also serves to interweave it with the history and mythology of Arda.

Reviewing the map's selection and representation principles reveals its multilayered character. Its overcrowded appearance suggests a dense and detailed knowledge of the terrain, yet at the same time the map hints at the limits of cartographic representation – though these boundaries (or openings) assume different shape in the east and west.[26] Another area of tension emerges from the presentation of diachrony as synchrony: the intersecting, superposed inscriptions that refer to different time periods contradict the impression given by the scale bar, suggesting that the represented spaces may be experienced in the narrated present. Scale as a basic principle furthermore insinuates a relation of coherence to the exterior world and renders the map compatible with established models for measurable spaces. The measurability of distances, which implies a precise cartographic approach based on unchanging selection criteria, is in turn undermined by the combination of different selection principles, which draw on historical and mythological concepts of space. In effect, the superimposition of competing perspectives contradicts the superficial impression of a coherent, uniform spatiality of Middle-earth.

2. Visual Design Strategies: Hybrid Historicization

If the Middle-earth map appears homogeneous at first glance but turns out to be fraught with tensions on closer inspection, the same can be said for the visual design principles, symbolic languages and stylistic borrowings combined thereon. Once again, the map of Middle-earth may serve as a starting point to demonstrate how historically divergent strategies of visualization, especially medieval and modern

26 By identifying territories without recording their boundaries as cultural markings, the Middle-earth map challenges a central cultural and geopolitical function of cartography: that of asserting control over a space by means of representation. See Ekman 2013: 59: »no administrative (political or other) borders are to be found anywhere on the general map. […] It portrays an internal tension between its natural landscape and cultural control of that landscape.«

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ones, intermesh. Beside the specific use of imaginings of the Middle Ages (that is, the particular form of medievalism), another matter must be of special interest: namely the way the map processes the underlying tension between discrepant world views and models of time and space.

Both the lettering and signs on the map of Middle-earth deftly position it within the twentieth century. The typography is dominated by serif lettering, albeit handwritten, so that it cannot display the uniformity of a printed font.[27] This calligraphic reversion – from the printed book back to manuscript culture – underlines a nostalgic tendency of the typography. At the same time, this leaning is combined with a modern, military system of signs and symbols. The catalogue documenting the exhibition *The Art of the Manuscript* (2022) points out that Tolkien, as a signals officer in the First World War, was familiar with instructions for the production of field sketches (such as those that appeared in a handbook by E. J. Solano, first published in London in 1916 and reissued several times).[28] Tolkien adopted various elements from this contemporary inventory, including the symbols for roads, fords and certain types of terrain.

On the map, the sober visual code of the field sketch meets elements that are given a three-dimensional appearance by means of shading. One of its striking aspects is the persistent mixing of two-dimensional orthogonal projection with representations from a bird's-eye view. Throughout the map, light appears to enter from the east, creating an impression of three-dimensionality, especially in the mountain ranges. Bird's-eye elements invite viewers to gaze into a landscape similar to various others sketched by Tolkien. For example, a study of the area surrounding Minas Tirith and Osgiliath, sketched in 1946, shows a mountainscape drawn in the same style that characterizes the map (McIlwaine 2018: 388, Fig. 122). In effect, the described combination opens up the terse, subjectless sign system of mapping for subjective spectator positions. Here Tolkien selects a mode of representation with a history of its own: aerial views of cities and landscapes first appeared alongside the

27 See Ekman 2013: 58, on the use of font sizes and capital letters as well as the direction of writing.

28 Cf. Fliss/Schaefer 2022: 146 (Fig. 107) as well as the comment on the illustration. Danielson 2020: 2f., describes customary cartographic styles of the early twentieth century and ascribes a fundamentally military outlook to Tolkien: »He approaches these maps in much the way that a military officer would, with a concern for being exact about distances that individuals and armies can travel, and topographic barriers to their maneuvers. This is reflected in his use of stylistic conventions similar to those he would have encountered in military maps – hachures and contour lines for elevation, with individual pictorial trees for forests that allow underlying topography to show through« (ibid.: 9). In my opinion, this generalization stretches the point, since the map's overall appearance – including the style of inscriptions and the selection principles described above – is incompatible with a military or strategic approach to topography.

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development of linear perspective in the Renaissance and became popular with the beginning of aviation (cf. Asendorf 2009; Doucet/Hunter/Robbins 2021).

Fig. 2: Mappa Mundi. Psalter world map, 1262–1300

Moreover, contemporary, modern forms of representation are combined with pre-modern types. By adopting specifically medieval cartographic conventions, the map of Middle-earth is visually connected to a fundamentally different conception of space. Medieval *mappae mundi*, after all, are based on a pre-modern cosmology.[29]

29 For an introduction to the origin and design of the *mappae mundi* see Edson 2007: 11–32; Baumgärtner 2017: 67–69; on the relationship between medieval world maps and world view see Baumgärtner/Schröder 2010; see Dünne 2011: 47–59, for the basic patterns of the cartographic imagination.

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In the well-known Psalter World Map (London, created after 1262) this cosmology is reflected in a bisection of space and, implicitly, of time (Fig. 2).

The earthly sphere is tucked into a vast ›beyond‹ while linear, historical time is embedded in eternity: a supratemporal present that simultaneously contains end and beginning.[30] In the Middle Ages this Christian model of time and space nevertheless coexisted with pre-Christian mythologies and their literary adaptations, featuring special zones of the otherworldly as well as temporal anomalies and asynchronies. Such paradigms of discontinuity necessarily clash with the modern model of a single space-time continuum, based on the assumption of universally valid rules – at least in a terrestrial context. When Tolkien (like his contemporary and friend C. S. Lewis) draws on the pre-modern, religious image of the world, borrowings from medieval forms of representation in the book and the map generate a fundamental tension between different models of perception and representation that cannot be fully explored here.[31]

One essential design principle of medieval world maps is immediately discernible in the Psalter Map: the image's proportions are not based on any quantifying scale, but on the relative importance of the represented figures and objects.[32] Both the size of the monumental otherworldly figures and the *orbis terrarum* itself bear witness to this principle. Jerusalem, as the centre of Christianity, occupies the middle of the map, and the Holy City is given a size roughly equivalent to the island of Sicily (which appears slightly to the south). Similarly, the 1954 map of Middle-earth reveals, on closer inspection, a visual hierarchy which abandons the principles of scale and consistent proportion. Instead, important places such as Hobbiton or Minas Tirith are oversized in comparison to the surrounding areas and other settlements. In the revised version of the map from 1980, this application of size to emphasize significance has been noticeably reduced.

The map of Middle-earth shares another representational principle with the Psalter Map: in both, diachrony is compressed into synchrony. The medieval *mappa mundi* records important historical events spatially: for example, the confinement of the savage hordes of Gog and Magog by Alexander the Great is illustrated by a mountain range bent into a ring wall, the Caspian Wall, breached only by the Gates

30 The oversized figures of Christ and the angels, which tower up behind the *orbis terrarum*, not only indicate a spatial and temporal hierarchy between the earthly and otherworldly spheres, they also point to a categorically different quality of the transcendent realm. Further on the Psalter Map: Schöller 2015; van Duzer 2019: 179–196; Grčić 2021: 25–46.

31 In a previous paper (Klinger 2011), I have examined Tolkien's mythopoetic transformation of landscape in relation to medieval concepts of space and passages into the otherworld.

32 This representational convention, usually known as ›hierarchical scale‹, dominated medieval art but did not exclude other types of perspective. Renaissance art replaced this prevailing convention by linear perspective, which constructs a single, homogeneous perception of pictorial space. Cf. Abels 1985; Ortmann 2014.

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of Alexander. Immediately below appears a smaller, schematic representation of Noah's Ark after its landing. This pictorial reference to an Old Testament event of historical significance documents the embedding of earthly history within a religious and mythological spatial order.[33]

The Caspian Wall with the Gates of Alexander points to a further principle of visualization, manifested in various places on the map: namely that territorial boundaries often coincide with mountain ranges, rivers or coasts.[34] Instead of being presented as culturally or politically defined constructions, they are naturalized – in exactly the same way as mountain-palisaded Mordor. This pattern of *naturalization* can likewise serve to organize mapped spaces outside the cultural sphere, as an early modern forest map of Württemberg, the *Chorographia Ducatus Wirtembergici* of 1596 by Georg Gadner (Fig. 3; cf. Bull-Reichenmiller 1996) shows on a regional level.

Fig. 3: Georg Gadner: Chorographia Ducatus Wirtembergici, 1596 (detail: regional map)

Almost everywhere on the map, the forests, each identified by name, are clearly set apart from the surrounding area, lending them an appearance of territoriality. Several forests on the map of Middle-earth, drawn with equally distinct outlines, convey exactly the same impression, most notably Mirkwood, Lórien and Fangorn.

33 For the cartographic linking of geography and history see Kugler 1998; von den Brincken 2008.

34 The Psalter Map once again employs a principle of representation which is characteristic for the *mappae mundi* as a whole; it is equally evident on the Ebstorf and Hereford world maps (both around 1300).

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Furthermore, Gadner's map contains elements lost to the past, such as Dachenhausen (Tachenhusen) castle, which had disappeared nearly two hundred years before the map was drawn.[35] Nonetheless, it is featured among other castles, towns and settlements without any visual distinction to highlight its phantom status. As in the *mappae mundi* and the map of Middle-earth, a diachronic dimension is spatially visualized.

The map created by Pauline Baynes for C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* – a series in seven volumes published between 1950 and 1956 – also displays motifs and structures borrowed from medieval maps. While Baynes supplied illustrations and partial maps for the books at the time of publication, the coloured general map was produced as a poster and published as late as 1972 (Fig. 4).[36]

Yet Lewis had already pictured a visual approximation to pre-modern cartography at an early stage. On 8 January 1951 he wrote to the illustrator: »My idea was that the map should be more like a medieval map than an Ordnance Survey[37] – mountains and castles drawn – perhaps winds blowing at the corners – and a few heraldic-looking ships, whales and dolphins in the sea« (Lewis 2007: 75). Some of the elements he envisioned, such as the »mountains and castles drawn« or the personified winds, correspond to the iconographic conventions of the *mappae mundi*.[38] The »heraldic-looking ships« and the depictions of sea creatures, on the other hand, are mostly found on portolan charts that became widespread in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, and on the world maps that succeeded them. Lewis's imagined map thus amalgamates different map types and historical styles of cartography.

35 Cf. the historical information provided on the website of the Baden-Württemberg state archive (Leobw, online).

36 Besides illustrations, the books contained maps that were reproduced (originally on the end papers) in black and white or in colour in different editions. A preliminary drawing by C. S. Lewis is preserved in the Bodleian Library (MS. Eng. lett. c. 220/1, fol. 160; available online at Sappho to Suffrage, online). It served as a starting point for Baynes's series of maps that accompanied the books: »Narnia and Adjoining Lands« (*Prince Caspian*, 1951), »Bight of Calormen und The Lone Islands« (*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 1952), »Wild Lands of the North« (*The Silver Chair*, 1953), »Tashbaan, the Desert and Archenland« (*The Horse and His Boy*, 1954). Baynes's poster map was also used as a book cover for the illustrated complete edition in German, published by Ueberreuter in 2019.

37 Lewis refers to the national mapping agency of the British Isles, the history of which dates back to the eighteenth century. Its name contains a clue to its original military focus, as ›survey‹ here relates specifically to reconnaissance.

38 The Hereford map (c. 1300) already shows personified winds, which continued to appear on the edges of maps into the modern age, frequently in the shape of heads blowing out fierce gusts (for example on the world map of the Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493).

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Fig. 4: Pauline Baynes: map relating to the Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis, poster 1972

Once again, only a section of the imagined world is shown on Baynes's general map, not the entirety of Narnia. The map's status as a fragment is furthermore emphasized by the oversized head of the lion Aslan, in the upper left corner, which stands out from its cartographic surroundings in a cosmic kind of breakthrough. Both Aslan's character and story show marked similarities with the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and his status as the son of God.[39] Given this context, the

39 Cf. Schakel 2013. The choice of animal, too, underscores the parallel, as the lion, based on the *Physiologus*-tradition, frequently typifies Christ in medieval art and literature.

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visual parallel with the depiction of Christ on medieval *mappae mundi* is hardly accidental. Like Christ on the Psalter Map, Aslan is associated with a transcendent space and his monumental depiction recalls the enormous head of Christ near the eastern top of the Ebstorf world map. This iconographic borrowing can be read as a reference to the underlying concept of a religious order of creation, linking Lewis's literary cosmos with the medieval Christian world view.[40]

The Narnia map borrows several other motifs and design principles from late medieval regional maps and portolan charts,[41] which focus on travel routes and connections between localities and regions, in accordance with new forms of usage. The portolan chart, of which the earliest extant examples date back to the late thirteenth century, mainly records coastlines and maritime routes. Navigation aids are complemented by striking depictions of ships, possibly an inspiration for Lewis's »heraldic-looking ships«. Baynes's map of Narnia also gives emphasis to the coastline, matched by the high proportion of space taken up by the sea, which – unlike the great ocean on Tolkien's map – is not left unfilled but animated by drawings of ships and connecting lines that indicate the routes travelled by the characters. These iconographic references prompt a reading of the sea as a realm of travel, rather than a mythologically significant transition zone into a spatio-temporally removed otherworld. While these ingredients suggest the conception of a travel map, the Narnia map lacks a characteristic feature of late medieval regional maps and nautical charts, namely the »effort to be historically up to date, and in part to provide a true-to-scale reproduction« (Baumgärtner/Schröder 2010: 77).[42] In its overall appearance, the Narnia map bears a closer resemblance to Fra Mauro's world map (around 1450), which combines elements of the *mappa mundi* with nautical chart principles and presents the sea as a site of travel (Fig. 5; cf. Edson 2007: 141–164).

40 Unlike the Psalter Map (and the map of Middle-earth), this map contains no indications of historical kingdoms or events. The naturalization of political/cultural territories is equally absent. Instead Baynes chooses to indicate different types of terrain by varying colours. These do not, however, coincide with territories or with label-bearing regions such as the »Wild Lands of the North«. In some cases the names of these areas cut across the geographical features. In effect, the only precisely drawn border is the coastline.

41 For an introduction to these map types, which were increasingly widespread in the late Middle Ages, see Baumgärtner/Schröder 2010: 76–80; for more on the portolan charts see Campbell 1987; Edson 2007: 37–59; Baumgärtner 2015.

42 While Baynes's map contains a scale bar with distances in miles at the bottom edge, it almost disappears among the heraldic ornamentation, and the highly stylized landscapes render it difficult to apply the scale.

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Fig. 5: Fra Mauro: world map, 1450 (detail: coast of Africa)

A visual alignment with nautical charts is also apparent in some of the maps accompanying George Martin's series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The third and final section

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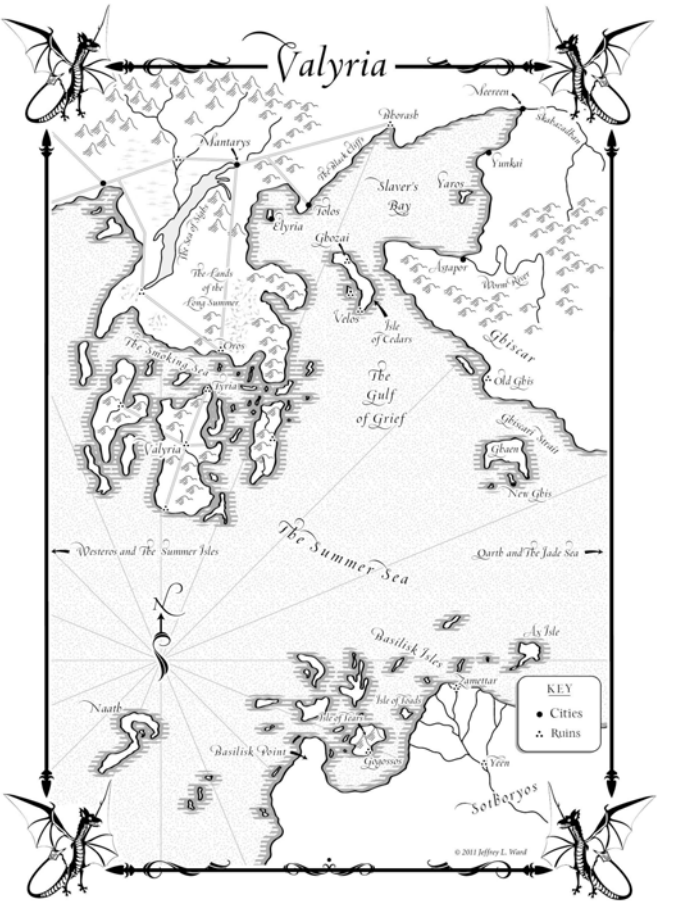
of this paper will illuminate their distinctive features. For now, a juxtaposition of one of these maps with the Narnia map can reveal striking shifts in the historicizing details. The fifth volume of Martin's series, *A Dance with Dragons* (2011), includes a partial map created by Jeffrey L. Ward, illustrating the area around the destroyed city of Valyria on a peninsula in Essos (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6: Jeffrey L. Ward: map of Valyria, in George R. R. Martin: A Dance with Dragons, 2011



This map as well as others in the Bantam Spectra edition incorporate a central feature of the portolan chart: the clearly visible network of lines used by navigators

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to set course. Known as ›rhumb lines‹, these threads emanate from the wind rose of portolan charts (Fig. 7).[43]

On the Valyria map, a stylized compass replaces the wind rose, and while the layout of the rhumb lines is obviously not suitable for navigation, it alludes to another cartographic function: to gain mastery over the world by means of reliable nautical routes and advanced navigation techniques. Pauline Baynes's illustration, in contrast, assigns the curvate lines traversing the sea exclusively to the protagonists' individual journeys: a substantial departure from the function of portolan charts.[44]

Fig. 7: Vesconte Maggiolo: portolan chart, Genoa 1547 (detail)

Baynes's map clearly endows Narnia's realms with historicizing references, but must at the same time ignore key aspects of the literary conception and its modernity. In Lewis's books, Narnia emerges as a parallel world, which coexists with 1940s

43 For more on rhumb lines or windrose lines, which were used on nautical charts into the nineteenth century, see Neumann 1998: 407f. The map of Middle-earth features a compass at the top right with a modern northward orientation, while medieval *mappae mundi* were nearly always east-oriented. Pauline Baynes also drew a north-oriented compass rose for the poster map.

44 Other ships are positioned outside these connecting lines, clearly signalling that they are not intended as indicators of frequently travelled maritime routes.

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England and can be accessed via specific portals (for instance through the wardrobe in Professor Digory Kirke's country house). Indeed other parallel worlds exist alongside Narnia, and they are all connected to the ›Wood Between the Worlds‹. The idea underlying these stories with their intricate web of worlds is the markedly modern notion of a multiverse. Lewis, however, links this idea with Christian, religious concepts (cf. Schwartz 2014: 37), as Baynes's poster testifies, where Aslan, the world's creator, bursts through the surface of the map.

Baynes's map acquires a distinct multilayered effect by means of framed vignettes inserted at the top right and bottom left,[45] each reproducing scenes from individual Narnia volumes and labelled with the respective book titles. This transgression of boundaries between representational levels can be identified as a visual metalepsis:[46] the framing world of the self-contained books is encapsulated inside the internal world of the map. In addition to Aslan's incursion from another dimension, this element represents another shift between levels. Yet a subtle tension arises between this second shift and the religiously coded order of creation: implicitly, the creation of the world itself is confronted with the author's literary creation.

As in Tolkien's works, features of modern cartography appear in the maps for Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, in both cases combined with the above-mentioned borrowings from historical iconography and pre-modern cartographic paradigms. The medievalization resulting from these re-creations has prompted some critics to refer to a general ›pseudo-medievality‹ of Fantasy maps.[47] However, the map-specific medievalisms[48] described here extend beyond surface

45 Baynes had already used this stylistic device on a poster map for the *Lord of the Rings*, published by George Allen & Unwin in 1970. Here (with the express permission of the author) a pictorial frieze was added at the top and bottom of Tolkien's map of Middle-earth, as well as framed vignettes in the central section. Since these ten vignettes show important scenes of the action, however, there is no leap to another level of the narration (smaller, less sharply demarcated vignettes of this kind can also be found on the Narnia map). The *Lord of the Rings* poster map is available at Tolkien Gateway 2019, online.

46 The concept of narrative metalepsis, introduced by Genette, refers to the intentional crossing of a boundary between the (extradiegetic) world of the narration and the (intradiegetic) narrated world (»a deliberate transgression between the world of the telling and the world of the told«; Pier 2016).

47 Ekmann 2013: 41, describes this tendency within Fantasy cartography – »(high) fantasy's general proclivity for pseudomedieval settings« – and ascribes »that same pseudomedieval aesthetic« to Tolkien's map of the Shire (ibid.: 49).

48 The terms *medievalism* and *neomedievalism* are sometimes treated as synonyms. However, individual authors distinguish between *medievalism* as imaginings and recreations of medievality that arise from engagement with historical sources or work by historians, and *neomedievalism* as an eclectic processing of the medieval, filtered through literary and other adaptations. See e.g. Kaufman 2010: 4: »Neomedievalism is thus not a dream of the Middle Ages but a dream of someone else's medievalism. It is medievalism doubled up upon itself.« Robinson/Clements 2009: 62, similarly state: »Neomedievalism does not look to the Middle Ages to

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textures. In Tolkien's and Lewis's work, they are anchored in space-time variations which resist the modern paradigm of a measurable, uniform continuum. Not least, the inhabitants of these mapped worlds include non-human beings with magical or ›supernatural‹ abilities, whose cultures and temporalities inform the maps in different ways. Their presence in Middle-earth and Narnia unlocks connections to a mythological array of meaning, most prominently a cosmology whose basic structures are rooted in the pre-modern religious mindscape. Within the framework of modernity, however, these structures become subject to a remodelling fraught with tension. The concept of a Narnian multiverse, or, in Tolkien's Arda cosmos, the narrative of the world's disastrous rounding with its attendant divergence of myth and history, indicate this tension most clearly.

The Narnia and the Middle-earth map, then, present us with forms of *hybrid historicization*. Postcolonial theory has reformulated the concept of the hybrid, shifting it from dubious mixing or crossbreeding to the breaking up of dominant discourses, into which »the voices of the Other are inscribed« (Schwarz 2015: 173).[49] If the notion that mapping spaces grants control over them is one of the rhetorical gestures of cartography, hybrid historicization, which indicates ruptures and tensions, can challenge or question this gesture of sovereignty. By integrating pre-modern elements, the maps discussed above, in my reading, provide clues to a challenge of this kind, expressed in the ›voice of the Other‹. On the map of Middle-earth, the bilingual toponymy gives the most obvious evidence. It can be read as either a settlement history or the trace of an exodus, leading to the disappearance of magic from Middle-earth. The Narnia map articulates this challenge across the layering of creation levels: a transcendent and a human, literary level each interrogate the other. Both maps oscillate between a confrontation and a homogenization of world views. From this context derives the particular importance of the limits of cartographic representation and the references to things beyond the maps.

The ›Brendan map‹ from the late twelfth century[50] (Fig. 8) shows a dimension that is tellingly absent from the maps of Middle-earth and Narnia: it represents the entire world, and, on a level angled away from it, earthly paradise – in a shape that

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use, to study, to copy, or even to learn; the perception of the Middle Ages is more filtered, perceptions of perceptions (and distortions), done without a concern for facts or reality.«

49 For more on the history of the term see Schwarz 2015: esp. 172–176. See also Coote 2010: 32: »At one end of the spectrum, the neomedieval encourages the substitution of superficial understanding, the ›gist‹ gathering of cultural bits and pieces, for real knowledge and understanding of the Middle Ages. On the other, it offers the insights of *a space in which the medieval can ›speak back‹* from the margins to which it has been confined by the domination of the modern.« [emphasis added]

50 The map is preserved in Bischofszell in the Canton of Thurgau in Switzerland (museum of local history, Dr. Albert Knoepfli-Stiftung); cf. Scafi 2006: 168–170 (Fig. 7.8a, 7.8b).

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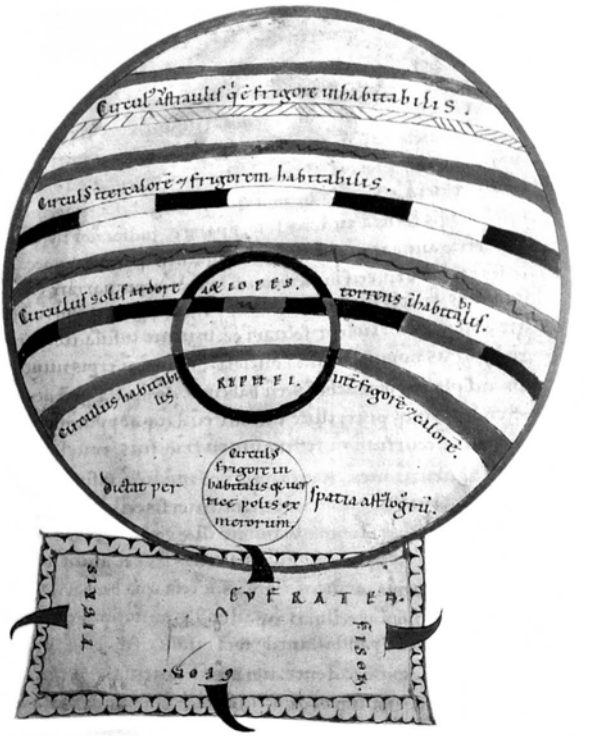
somewhat resembles a flying carpet.[51] Such visualizations of transcendent spatiality are omitted in Fantasy maps that follow modern conventions of representation. The multiverse surrounding Narnia and its connections to the historical present lie beyond the map, whose references to transcendence can only be decoded in an allegorical mode. The connections between Middle-earth and Valinor shape a mythological subtext on the Middle-earth map, whereas the ›straight road‹ escapes the cartographic mode of representation. In contrast, the neomedievalism that characterizes the universe of George Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* results in quite different cartographic gaps and representational limits.

Fig. 8: ›Brendan Map‹, Bischofszell (southern Germany, late 12th century)



51 Since the ›Brendan Map‹ adheres to the zonal map concept, it sets apart earthly paradise as a distinct climatic sphere, separate from the usual climate zones.

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3. Serialization and Transformation

Of George Martin's Fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996–2011), five books have so far been published. The maps accompanying these novels have a markedly different history of creation and development than those in Tolkien's and Lewis's works. The series' individual volumes contain partial maps that vary according to edition and country of publication; furthermore, their fragmentation reflects the incomplete nature of the narrated story. Alongside the books, a collection of twelve poster maps is advertised under the title *The Lands of Ice and Fire – Maps from King's Landing to across The Narrow Sea* (Bantam Books/HarperCollins Voyager 2012), and the television series *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019), produced by HBO Entertainment, features much-lauded title sequences, designed as flights across moving map landscapes. As might be expected, the manifold maps encompass a broad spectrum of media, styles and patterns of representation. Since the cartographic world of the *Ice and Fire* universe is constantly growing, the following discussion can only consider a few characteristic examples. They are part of a collective, market-driven creation process whose official strand is coordinated by publishers and production companies. Their design is therefore less closely linked to the practice and principle of (book) authorship than in the case of Tolkien and Lewis. George Martin himself reported that he provided preliminary map sketches at the publishers' request and elaborated them on demand.[52] The partial maps were then produced professionally by various commissioned illustrators. In the first volume (*A Game of Thrones*, 1996), partial maps of Westeros (»The North«/»The South«) appeared separately; later volumes added detailed maps of certain regions and expanded the represented areas. As individual plot strands shifted to Essos, partial maps of this much larger continent were published.

Instead of a large general map, then, the books contain a series of partial views which can and will be complemented in accordance with the story's progress. The wide stylistic variation of the *Ice and Fire* cartography is immediately obvious. Three illustrators have emerged as leading map artists: James Sinclair, Jeffrey L. Ward (for the American edition at Bantam Spectra) and Richard Geiger (for the British edition at HarperCollins Voyager). The maps designed by Geiger not only differ stylistically from the American versions; they also contain additional place names. At present, the most widely distributed maps appear to be those by Jeffrey Ward, reproduced in the latest US editions of all volumes. They are loosely based on representation patterns and selection principles that were common from the late eighteenth century until well into the nineteenth century, particularly on regional maps. These maps

52 Among other things, he admitted that it took an effort to fill the blank spaces in his map with the names of regions and localities. These and other remarks are recorded in a video from 2014 (cf. Aegon Targaryen 2021, online). One of Martin's map sketches is archived at Whitehead 2012, online.

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give precedence to settlements and cultural sites; a map of the island of Menorca, printed in Madrid in 1780, presents a typical example (Fig. 9). Besides roads and rivers, the map foregrounds aerial views of landforms in three-dimensional relief. These features reappear in Ward's illustrations, and the key that (with slight variations) accompanies all *Ice and Fire* maps published at Bantam provides a selection similar to the historical map. The latter spotlights towns, buildings and localities, while the former decodes the symbols for *Cities*, *Towns*, *Castles*, *Ruins* and *Ruined Castles*.

Fig. 9: Tomás López de Vargas Machuca: map of Menorca, 1780 (detail)

In addition to the black and white maps within the books, Random House commissioned cartographer Jonathan Roberts to produce the above-mentioned, official collection of large-format regional, continental and world maps, *The Lands of Ice and Fire*. In his blog, *Fantastic Maps*, Roberts underlines the canonical status of his maps, but at the same time addresses their provisional nature: »George RR Martin was quite specific that these maps would be an interpretation of the current state of knowledge of the world rather than a faithful satellite imaging.« (Fantastic Maps 2013, online). The phrasing reveals a tension between the ideal of the satellite image, a complete view obtained by neutral technical equipment from a great dis-

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tance, and limited knowledge, requiring additional interpretation. Roberts's use of hypsometric colouring to indicate elevations conforms to contemporary representation principles. This conformity, alongside the vivid depiction of relief, suggests that the shown landforms comply with common standards of measurement. In another blog, *Atlas of Ice and Fire*, Science Fiction expert Adam Whitehead not only presents his own maps, but juxtaposes the *Lands of Ice and Fire* collection with non-canonical general and partial maps (›fan maps‹) in great abundance. Moreover, his posts discuss the HBO series *Game of Thrones* and offer detailed commentary on the maps published in the books.[53]

In addition to the proliferation of maps and illustrators, an open-ended process of supplementation, revision and expansion characterizes the current *Ice and Fire* cartography – a process that the digitally produced maps of Roberts and Whitehead attempt to counteract with a visual impression of completeness and permanence. Their work is intensely concerned with sustaining the ›iconic illusion‹: use of representational paradigms from contemporary cartography as well as geoscientific touches serve to suggest a factual similarity between the maps and extra-cartographic, extra-literary spaces. One such feature on Whitehead's maps is the specification of latitudes. Yet the scale bar, which gives distances in miles, creates coherence with a somewhat quaint-looking signal instead of the presently common reduction ratio.[54] Overall, the cartography surrounding the books inevitably reflects the incompleteness of the series, since new volumes may reveal new regions or prompt inevitable revisions. At the same time, the maps' growth is dominated by a canon-forming dynamic, which has its counterpart in the close conformity to contemporary representation principles and the use of the latest digital design technologies. Only the caption »the known world« on Roberts's large general map hints at the limits of cartographic possibilities (Fantastic Maps 2013, online).

In the context of a Fantasy-specific tension between familiar cartographic patterns and the visualization of never-seen spaces with their own laws, one area of the *Ice and Fire* world must be of particular interest: heterotemporality and heterospatiality of the narrated universe cluster in the far north of Westeros, beyond the Wall. On the earliest published maps of the North, this region contained only a few labels covering large areas – »the Haunted Forest«, »the Frostfangs« (a mountain range), »the Frozen Shore«. As the series continued, the cartographic focus shifted northward, in line with plot developments. However, even the embellished presentation of areas »Beyond the Wall«, designed by Jeffrey Ward, looks quite barren (Fig. 10). Names have been accorded to certain places, bodies of water and mountain regions,

53 For an introduction see Whitehead, online.

54 See for example the design of a map of Westeros, aimed at calculating the size of the continent and its position on the globe (cf. Whitehead, online). Contemporary maps customarily provide a numerical scale indicating the reduction ratio.

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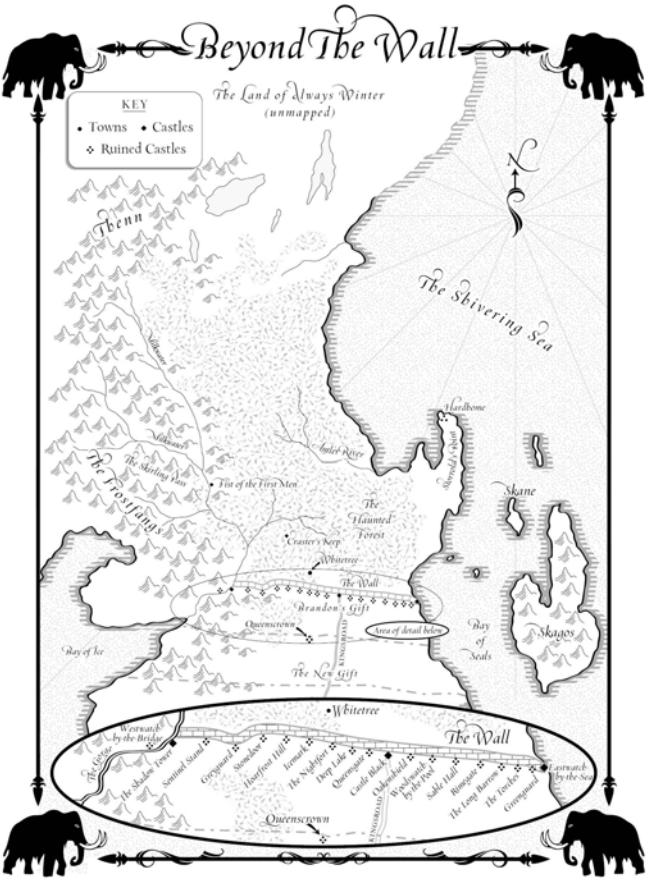
but the labelling remains sparse overall – due, by all appearances, to the geopolitical selection principle embodied in the key, which gives priority to settlements and the remnants of destroyed settlements. The great variety of life-forms and cultures beyond the Wall that the story itself explores have left no mark on the map: evidently, because they failed to construct castles or towns.

Fig. 10: Jeffrey L. Ward: 'Beyond the Wall' map, in George R. R. Martin: A Dance with Dragons, 2011



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The significance of the zone beyond the Wall of Westeros arises from the peculiar paradigm of winter, which intermeshes temporal and spatial dimensions.[55] On the one hand, the seasonal cycle of Westeros is extended, irregular, and cannot be reliably predicted. Since summer has already stretched across several years as the narrative picks up, widespread fears anticipate a prolonged winter of possibly apocalyptic proportions. Winter does in fact set in at the end of the fifth volume, *A Dance with Dragons*, but its longer-term effects are so far unknown. On the other hand, a »Land of Always Winter« exists in the extreme north of Westeros. Between this area and the Wall extends a zone largely covered by »the Haunted Forest« and peopled by threatening creatures. Besides human wildlings and giants, »shapechangers« or »skinchangers« and »White Walkers« (or simply »Others«), who transform the dead into undead revenants or »wights«, populate the area. Due to this threat, the inhabitants of Westeros fear any breach of the Wall that would allow these outsiders to invade the mapped and civilized parts of the continent. The frequently quoted motto of House Stark, »Winter is Coming«, emblematically embodied in the prehistoric direwolf, signals a paradoxical resilience which already incorporates defeat: while war can be waged against the creatures of winter, there is no way of fighting the change of seasons.

Ward's »Beyond the Wall« map therefore places visual emphasis not on the dwellings of threatening strangers and otherworldly creatures, but on defensive fortifications. The line of forts or watchtowers along the Wall is duplicated below the main map, enlarged as if under a magnifying glass. This stylistic device emphasizes and reinforces a highly significant border, separating the sphere of civilization with its culture-fostering economy, its political territories and conflicts – »the plane of organization, denoted by houses, sigils and banners, games of thrones and clashes of kings« (Leederman 2015, 200) – from the unstructured wilderness. The Land of Always Winter is now explicitly marked as »unmapped«, a distinction which further stresses the underlying opposition between civilization and wilderness. For the people of Westeros, the populations roaming the intermediate zone between the Wall and the land of winter display no discernible form of organization; they are the embodiment of wildness, chaos, and excessive violence, augmented by magic.[56]

In Martin's books, the area beyond the Wall is not conceptually rooted in a mythological order of space. The paradigm of winter defines it as a separate spatio-temporal zone, where the threat of a future apocalypse coincides with the living

55 Cf. Martins 2020 on the overlapping of political, climatic and supernatural meanings. Nahornave 2023 proposes an eco-critical interpetation, arguing that the books contain a commentary on climate change and environmental crises.

56 For the constructions of foreignness/otherness see Leederman 2015; Marques 2016 (on the ›Haunted Forest‹ as a medievalized space of the Other). See also the postcolonial reading in Elnahla 2013.

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return of prehistory. Beyond the Wall, ice-age conditions prevail, mammoths still roam, and human cave-dwellers and hunters live at a primeval stage of civilization. The onset of winter is personified by the White Walkers, whose bodies radiate cold – a climatic invasion on the micro level. Yet the maps fail to visualize the distinctive intermeshing of temporal and spatial dimensions, the heterotemporality of winter, the spatial confrontation between epochs and the diversity of magical possibilities beyond the Wall. On Ward's expanded map of the North, only the silhouettes of mammoths that guard its corners as prehistoric emissaries allude to the temporal agglomerations and entanglements. Once again, the key provides clues to the specific historicity of the maps, drawing attention not just to inhabited settlements and castles, but also to »ruins« and »ruined castles« – that is, to relics of earlier events and conflicts, indicators of what once was. A diachronic dimension is accessible exclusively from the perspective of the narrated present, instead of emerging as a phantom presence of the past. The map's geopolitical focus on territorial dominions includes traces of war, destruction and decline, but – apart from broadly sketched landforms – does not yield a distinctive signature for the bewildering Outside of civilization. Only the focus on the Wall, a boundary of fundamental significance for the Westerosian world view, suggests a critical zone of contact and conflict.[57] And only the way the map fades into the unknown and unmapped north indicates the limits of representation.

A transposition into moving pictures expanded and transformed the cartographic code of images and signs. In the opening sequence of the HBO series *Game of Thrones*, awarded an Emmy for Outstanding Main Title Design in 2011,[58] a simulated camera-eye flies across the digitally animated map landscape, zooming in and out, while buildings, towns and castles rise out of the ground like mushrooms (Fig. 11).[59]

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57 On the historical implications in an American context see Zontos 2015, 109f.: »Martin may have been inspired by Hadrian's Wall, but his Wall has a unique American identity. It is the same old frontier line that [Frederick Jackson] Turner first mentioned. But it has changed into a multisided frontier, a frontier as a setting of conflict as well as of contact. Its complexity and transformation reveal the changes that have been wrought upon American identity itself.«

58 The production company Rock Paper Scissors/Elastic created all the title sequences under creative director Angus Wall. The following remarks refer exclusively to the opening credits of the first season in 2011 (cf. Art of the Title 2011, online).

59 Axelrod 2013 describes the elaborate production process, divided among several contributors, as follows: »Using only pencil and paper, an artist begins by transforming the city into a clockwork model, with mechanical diagrams detailing how the city will build itself in the title sequence. The designs are handed off to the computer graphics department. One team member fine-tunes the shadow cast by the buildings. Another oversees the camera shots, adjusting angles and frames. Still another worker, the so-called smoke artist, adds final tint and color.«

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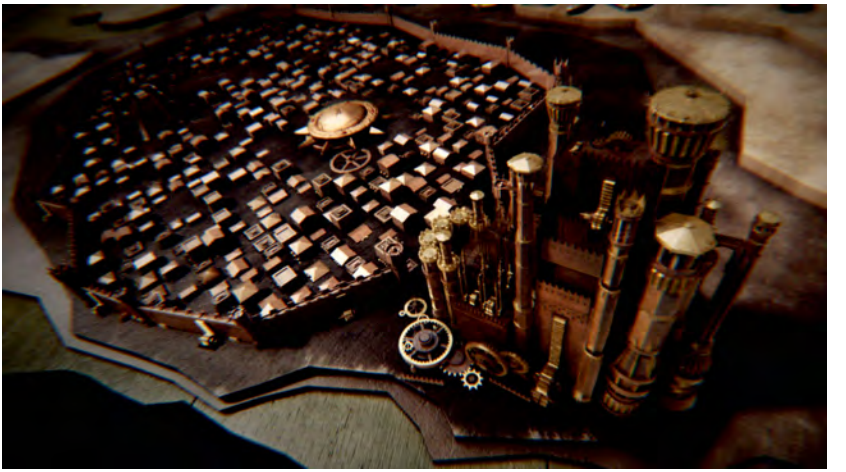
Fig. 11: Title sequence of HBO series Game of Thrones, 2011 (extract)



However, the structures shown are made of cogwheels, pistons, screws and bolts interlocking like clockwork or machine components. According to statements by the creative director and title designer Angus Wall, they were inspired by the inventions of Leonardo da Vinci.[60] The focus on settlements and seats of power remains the dominant principle; natural landscapes are reduced to clusters of geometric shapes that flit past the edges of the image. In this sequence, the machinery of power sprouts from a landscape designed like a game board, interlinking organic growth and architecture in a bustling array of cogwheels and pistons. The details show military equipment and fortifications, as well as territorial demarcations between seats of power. The visibly constructed nature of the fictional world – a cross between a diorama and a labelled map – is rendered dynamic as the camera-eye shifts from hovering to rapid flight, with frequent changes of direction and viewing angle. In this manner, the sequence generates tension between the artificiality of the rigid, board-like map and the interplay of a mobile gaze with animated cityscapes. The animated maps, too, underwent a process of serialization, as a new title sequence was produced for each season of *Game of Thrones*, each presenting central settings.

In each title sequence, the viewer enters the *Game of Thrones* universe through a spherical astrolabe that acts as frame and gateway to the invented world. An artistic replication of the literary cosmos is epitomized by an astronomical instrument, suggesting an identification of world-building with the process of surveying it. At the

60 »Art Director Rob Feng referenced Leonardo's machines […]. We wanted the title sequence to be rooted in the world of the show, which is a technically unsophisticated place, but to also have a complexity that gives it life.« Angus Wall, quoted in Perkins 2011.

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same time, the astrolabe functions as a historicizing signal for a pre-industrial universe, and the materiality of the mapscape provides further reference to pre-modernity. Its cogs, gears and machinery are intended to look as though exclusively fashioned from ›natural materials‹, such as wood, metal and leather.[61] In addition, the allusion to Leonardo da Vinci's machines points to the liminal period of the Renaissance and the concept of a technological progress anticipating modernity.

Unlike the two-dimensional maps in the books, the HBO title sequence features distinct signs of historicity – albeit with a starkly homogenizing effect. They point to the Renaissance as an age of discoveries and inventions and employ this topos as well as the moving mechanical devices to insinuate a compelling path towards future industrialization and mechanization. In contrast, the world described in the books and the television series is dominated by an eclectic neomedievalism, which assembles ingredients from different eras.[62] Although the books primarily borrow from the Middle Ages and the early modern period, imaginings of pre- and protohistory underpin key concepts of the foreign or Other. Compared to this approach, the cartographic worlds of this Fantasy universe prove to be reductionist and schematizing rather than hybrid.

Their seriality and incompleteness, however, invites ongoing visualizations – including non-commercial and non-canonical creations. An inventive, complex example from the diverse and productive realm of fan art may therefore serve to spotlight an alternative approach. Working on a private commission, freelance artist Francesca Baerald painted a watercolour map of the North of Westeros. Her work adopts the continent's ›canonical‹ outline, but its lavish design, replete with concrete details, diverges substantially from the unadorned maps in the books (Fig. 12).

The displayed section of the continent is framed by strips of parchment, showing traces of aging and wear. The parchment frame in turn is filled with celticized ornaments and vignettes, containing named castles, the abandoned tower of Queenscrown and forts on the Wall: a graphic visualization of the omnipresent key to the printed maps. The desolation evoked by deserted sites of dominion and war is reinforced by two skulls in each of the top corners. They gaze forward as if from catacombs, in vivid contrast to the pair of oversized living animals at the painting's bottom, a raven and an albino direwolf. The actual map is designed as a labelled

61 »Some people have actually thought that we built those titles practically out of wood and metal, but they are all done on the computer to emulate real physical textures and materials.« Angus Wall, quoted in Axelrod 2013.

62 See Marshall 2011, 22, who defines *neomedievalism* as »a self-conscious, ahistorical, non-nostalgic imagining or reuse of the historical Middle Ages that selectively appropriates iconic images, often from other medievalisms, to construct a presentist space that disrupts traditional depictions of the medieval.«

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landscape, drawn in perspective, from which solitary, disproportionately large castles project. In the surrounding sea, obviously inspired by the iconography of early modern world maps, a sinking ship and a sea serpent hint at maritime dangers.

Fig. 12: Francesca Baerald: The North, 2017

The colour scheme, with its muted earthy tones and cool nuances, matches the densely packed signs of transience and historicity and reinforces the link to the theme of winter. A striking feature overall is an eclectic use of historical pictorial signals and motifs, ranging from the early Middle Ages to the early modern era,[63] very much in keeping with Martin's practice of textual montage. The visual prominence of the raven and the wolf suggests a rule of animals over the depopulated world, and simultaneously recalls a common motif in Old English literature, namely the carrion-feeding ›beasts of battle‹ (cf. Neubauer 2014). The only dynamic element is the white wolf placed directly beside the lettering for ›Westeros‹, its hind part bursting from the ice in flame-like shape: an embodiment, it seems, of winter's threatening nature. The painting's animal protagonist is most probably Ghost, the direwolf of Jon Snow, Lord Stark's illegitimate son who will head the defence of the Wall. Strikingly, the figure of the wolf not only breaches the boundary between the

63 Possibly as far as the Baroque period, as the pairs of skulls recall the visual motif of *vanitas*, which was particularly popular in the seventeenth century.

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embedded continent and the frame drawing, but is on the point of leaping across this outer frame as well.[64] Its direction of movement evokes the expulsion and exile of the Starks (who display a direwolf on their coat of arms), but also links the space of the image with that of the viewer. While the raven, its beak wide open as if to emit an alarm call, seems to emulate a narrator's function, the leaping wolf actively transmits a message which could well be »Winter Is Coming«. Baerald's map-painting displays various links to the text and cartography of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and offers an interpretation of the north and of winter that underscores the significance of animals as intermediaries. Beneath the mapped continent, her painting exposes an ice shelf, indicating the transtemporal presence of winter.

Baerald's map stands apart from the paratexts of the published books and implicitly distances itself from their cartography. By disrupting standard geoscience-based representations and reductions and combining them with strongly themed and embodied pictorial elements, the artist gestures towards heterospatiality and encourages viewers to envision the literary concepts of spatio-temporal alterity. With her montage of historical visual patterns, of frames and nesting elements, she creates a hybridity and complexity equally present in the maps of Middle-earth and Narnia, but absent from the ›official‹ *Ice and Fire* maps.

In conclusion, hybrid historicization emerges as a prominent visualizing mode employed to signal the Fantasy-specific incoherences and fractures between incompatible models of space and time. Against this background, a shift of perspective and an investigation of the ways in which Fantasy maps engage with modernity, or comment on (post)modernity could certainly produce stimulating new insights. In the maps relating to *A Song of Ice and Fire*, cartographic modernisms are more obvious and more dominant than in the older works of Tolkien and Lewis. Their prevailing function – to offer guidance within the narrated realms – and their inventory of geopolitical symbols foreclose visual experiments that might, for instance, illustrate the merging of space-time parameters in the concept of winter, or the conflation of future apocalypse and prehistory. While the *Ice and Fire* poster maps emphatically strive to approximate contemporary models of mapping and to lend geographical fixity to the Fantasy world, the HBO title sequences, in contrast, show how visualized assumptions about history and modernity can intermesh and thereby highlight the alterity of Fantasy universes. In diverse ways, the discussed visualizations of Fantasy worlds can inspire us to imagine alternative space-time connections, and

64 See the discussion of the wolf motif in Leederman 2015, 190–199, and the observation: »The boundaries of the wolf's territory are mellifluous, ever-changing according to need and population« (ibid.: 191). The strong presence of animals in direct relation to the space of the map contrasts markedly with Jeffrey Ward's maps, where the silhouettes of animals and mythical creatures are banished to the ornamental edges.

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to reflect critically or creatively on our own preconceptions about cartographic representation.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: ›The West of Middle-earth at the End of the Third Age‹, drawn by Christopher Tolkien, 1980. In: *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Lord of the Rings*. New York 2005, © HarperCollins. © The Tolkien Estate. Source: https://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/File:Christopher_Tolkien_-_The_West_of_Middle-earth.png [accessed: 1 March 2024].

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Fig. 3: Georg Gadner, *Chorographia Ducatus Wirtembergici*, 1596; regional map, detail. Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Abt. Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg, EL 68 IV Nr. 47. Source: Schwäbischer Heimatbund, Regionalgruppe Nürtingen (ed.): *Die Teufelsbrücke zwischen Hardt und Oberensingen*. Nürtingen 2012, pp. 10.

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Fig. 9: Tomás López de Vargas Machuca (1730–1802): Mapa De La Isla De Menorca, Dividido En Los Terminos De Alhayor, Ciudadela, Ferrarias, Mahon y Mercadal […]. Madrid 1780 (detail). Source: https://realbiblioteca.es/es/node/290 [accessed: 1 March 2024].

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Fig. 11: Screenshot from the HBO series *Game of Thrones*, title sequence 2011, season 1. © HBO/Home Box Office, Inc. Source: https://www.artofthetitle.com/title/game-of-thrones/ [accessed: 1 March 2024].

Fig. 12: Francesca Baerald: The North, 2017. © Francesca Baerald. Source: https://francescabaerald.artstation.com/projects/0V3Ye [accessed: 1 March 2024].

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The Fantasy Novel as Commodity

The Aesthetics of a Neomedieval Book Design

Theresa Specht

Bookshops have their own logics and aesthetics. In the branches of large bookshop chains – just as in department stores and supermarkets – there is clearly nothing random about the arrangement of the products. In this environment, books are presented not so much as the unique oeuvres of authors, but rather as consumer goods that seek to be noticed and sold. Their arrangement and combination is based on a calculated marketing strategy (cf. Drügh 2015: 14).[1] One way to direct customers' attention is to arrange books in product groups, another is to conspicuously display (potentially) popular books near the shop entrance (cf. Clement, Hille et al. 2008: 752).

Local bookshops frequently position books together based on the principle of ›customers who bought this item also bought…‹. But this principle is already incorporated in the production process, as shown by the strikingly homogeneous colouring and design of particular product groups (cf. Phillips 2007: 29f.). If you find yourself looking at pastel backgrounds, floral decorations and rose-gold lettering, you have to be in the ›chick lit‹ section. This literature, written by, for and about women, is not really defined by character constellations, plot elements – mostly connected to men – or motifs. Instead, as the German Wikipedia entry explains, the attribution of individual works to this subgenre of popular literature is »mainly implied by the literary market and the book trade, which have offered a flood of pastel-coloured covers on separate shelves labelled ›(freche) Frauen‹ ((sassy) women)« (Wikipedia, 2023).[2] This suggests that the genre is defined by the marketing departments of publishing houses. They establish and develop conventions of cover design to attract the attention of a certain class of female buyer: »publishers have grouped certain works under a combination of subject-matter, packaging and marketing. The covers are

1 Drügh's observation about supermarkets, that products, product images and consumption have a »culture-forming, culture-ordering and culture-interpreting function« (Drügh 2015: 14), can also be applied to bookshops.

2 All German citations translated by T.S.

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candy-bright, heavy in pink and fluorescence. The titles are also candy-bright« (Knox 2000).

A similar literary homogeneity can also be detected on the book covers in another corner of the bookshop. Pastel is replaced by black as the defining colour; floral designs give way to swords, axes and armour; the lettering is no longer rose-gold but silver, bronze or gold. A glance into the shelves of Fantasy literature reveals these and other family resemblances.[3] They are an important hint that the book cover does more than just protect the body of the book from damage during transport and use (technical function). As a market of unique products, the book market is characterized by structural insecurity and uncertainty of quality. The range of products is overwhelmingly large, but it is difficult to get enough information before buying to avoid making a mistake (cf. Karpik 2007: 13–25; Reichert 2017: 13–18). In this context, the cover design has important functions. The book cover serves to give orientation to buyers, »because the main aim is to convey the character of the book, the genre. Readers must be able to assess at a glance what awaits them« (orientation function) (Wilking 2021a: 17). The cover design does not allow fully reliable conclusions about the quality and fit of the purchase, yet its specificity appears to alleviate the structural uncertainty of the book-buying process. At the same time, the cover design draws attention to the book (cf. Magenau 2018: 379), which needs to conform to its Fantasy surrounding while standing out as something special (advertising function): »They [the covers; TS] must fit the pigeonhole and be original at the same time. […] For bookshops, though, they have to be designed in such a way that they are placed on the appropriate table and nonetheless stand out on that table« (Wilking 2021a: 17). According to the statistics, even focused buyers only look at a book for eight seconds at most. This means that the product has no time to convince them with the blurb or the novel's opening – the cover is what counts! It has been estimated that 70% of all book purchases are motivated by the cover design (cf. Magenau 2018: 379f.; Erben 2005: 98). This makes it all the more crucial that this design gives a reliable impression of the content that can be expected. Thus, the book cover, in its creative function, contributes to an overall aesthetic conception of the commodity on sale, the novel (cf. Huse 2013: 91f.).

The question to be asked about popular Fantasy literature, then, is this: how does it use cover design to make the Fantasy novel an aesthetically complete, precisely composed product, negotiating the tension between genre affiliation and exceptionality, between attracting attention and providing information? To answer this,

3 Ludwig Wittgenstein uses this term to define the concept of ›game‹, for which – because of the combination of commonalities and particularities of different games – no definition of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions can be established: »the various resemblances between members of a family […] overlap and criss-cross in the same way« (Wittgenstein 2009: 36).

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we must begin with semiotic considerations, to clarify what kind of sign system a cover design is and how it is able to generate meaning (1.). The second section of this chapter gives a short history of the book design of popular Fantasy (2.). Works of Epic Fantasy are considered to be ›neomedieval‹ since they appropriate and transform medieval inventories and narratives to create holistic, secondary worlds (cf. Eco 1986; Velten 2018: 14). Although aspects of these worlds or the worlds as such can be perceived as somewhat ›medieval‹, they do not refer to the Middle Ages as a historic period. This for example distinguishes the Epic Fantasy from historical novels, which evoke a historic past (c.f. Velten 2024a). In the context of this evolution of book design, the third section gives a detailed analysis of the cover design of the first volume of Markus Heitz's *Zwerge* (*Dwarves*) series, published by Piper in 2016. This analysis also includes the design of the series as a whole (3.). The aim of the article is to identify a specific neomedieval book aesthetics of popular Fantasy, in which perceived ›medievalness‹ becomes the aesthetic signum of the Fantasy novel as commodity.

1. Semiotics of the Book Cover

A book's cover does not simply stop the pages from falling apart. It has a greater function for the novel. Its design combines a multitude of verbal and non-verbal sign systems, including colour, typography, text and image. The book is a »polysemiotic, complex« sign system (Mayer 2014: 199). This applies both to the ›literary novel‹, which is part of high culture and takes a very reflexive approach to the medium of the book (cf. Schmitz-Emans 2019: 43–49),[4] and to the popular Fantasy novel. In its specific medial manifestation, the physical book and its design have meaning; the physical book itself has a communicative value which transcends that of the material text it contains. This text – surrounded by the book cover – develops an autonomous meaning and aesthetics in the assemblage of its signs. The outward appearance of the book as a medium – its colour, illustrations, typography, or the way it feels to the touch – must be categorically distinguished from the semantics and aesthetics of the text. But the book cover itself also has meaning and develops its own aesthetics. These do not change the book's content, but the cover design frames the book's reception in a way that makes a difference (or, in its function as an incentive to buy, it makes reception possible in the first place): »The materiality of objects of communication necessarily constitutes a spectrum of object dimensions, which can po-

4 While there is a huge volume of research on literary novels (»Buchliteratur«), far less work has been done on book design in popular literature and its aesthetics. Lohmüller (2008: 7) suggests that this is due to a defensive reaction among researchers, who are critical of contemporary popular culture.

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tentially be semanticized and therefore serve as signifier for a signified, in semiotic interdependence with the supposed ›content‹« (Fleuster 2022: 58).

To understand how the book cover generates meaning, some semiotic reflections are needed about what type of sign systems we are dealing with here. The book text is a signifier for a concrete narrative, such as the story of Frodo, the fate of Danaerys Targaryen and Jon Snow, or the tale of the Witcher Geralt and his adoptive daughter Ciri (the signified). This could also be described as a primary sign system, in which the signifier and the signified are combined (cf. Barthes 2010: 256).[5] This sign, consisting of the book text and the narrative, is combined with the book cover – consisting of text, illustrations, colour and typography – to form a new sign system. This can be described as a secondary sign system, like the one which Roland Barthes identifies in the myth: »In myth, we find again the tri-dimensional pattern which I have just described: the signifier, the signified and the sign. But myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system. That which is a sign […] in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second« (Barthes 2000: 114).[6] For book design this means that the sign system consisting of the book text and the narrative becomes the signified of the secondary sign system, in which the book design becomes the signifier (cf. Mayer 2014: 201–202). It is only this combination of primary and secondary sign systems that makes it clear how the combination of book text and book cover can generate a meaning which is added to that of the novel itself and allows buyers in the bookshop to make well-founded assumptions about what kind of (Fantasy) novel they are looking at.

The meaning arising through and with the book design can be generated in at least three ways, as Franziska Mayer describes (cf. Mayer 2014: 200). Firstly, the materiality of the book allows conclusions to be drawn about its context of production. Thread sewn or adhesive binding, hardcover or paperback, gilt edges or not, elaborate design or not: all this can give hints as to how much symbolic or economic capital the book offers buyers and sellers – or how much it demands of them. The family resemblances in book design that can be observed within a genre point to a second possibility of generating meaning: conventionalization. Verbal and non-verbal signs become markers of genres, popular plot elements or character constellations. Often, core design elements first appear in particularly popular books and are

5 »We must here be on our guard for despite common parlance which simply says that the signifier expresses the signified, we are dealing, in any semiological system, not with two, but with three different terms […] there are, therefore, the signifier, the signified and the sign, which is the associative total of the first two terms« (Barthes 2000: 113).

6 In his work on the language of fashion (1990: 28), Barthes uses the concept of metalanguage: »in the second case, the primary system (ERC) constitutes the level of content for the secondary system […]; system 1 then corresponds to the level of object language, system 2 to the level of metalanguage.«

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then conventionalized by repetition and variation. This can be observed, for example, in the international bestseller *P.S. I Love You* by Cecilia Ahern: its sky-blue colour scheme, combined with wispy clouds and a curvy, script title font, had a major influence on the design of similar novels (cf. Mayer 2014: 204–206). Following the success of Daniel Kehlmann and Peter Wohlleben, their would-be emulators imitate their colour schemes – ›Kehlmann blue‹ and ›Wohlleben green‹ – to signal their affinity with these popular predecessors and thus attract more attention (cf. Magenau 2018: 379–381). The books following Dan Brown's global successes, books that expose secrets of the church as an institution, display a striking »combination of clerical-religious motifs and black and red colour schemes«. This shows that conventionalizations can apply not only to colours but also to motifs, objects and typography (Mayer 2014: 205).

Thirdly, book design can generate meaning by producing relations of similarity between the exterior and interior of a book. Armour and swords on the front cover allow the assumption that the novel itself is also concerned with knights in armour, who fight their way through their adventures, sword in hand. Such ›iconic relations of illustration‹ (Mayer 2014: 200) can refer to archetypal characters, objects relevant to the plot, key motifs or narrative structures, which the novel promises to fulfil. The book design has to perform a balancing act. On the one hand, it must fit into the genre – with the associated expectations about reception. On the other hand, it has to diverge from the genre strikingly enough to attract the attention of potential buyers. In short, it needs to be perceived as an individual product within the genre, whose exterior (also) constitutes a promise about its content. These three different ways in which book design can create meaning – the indexicalization of the production context, the conventionalization of genre indicators, and the relation of similarity between the cover design and the book text – have many points of overlap. The depiction of swords on the front cover can be part of a conventionalized arsenal of representation and simultaneously signify an iconic relationship of illustration with the preferred weapon of the characters. Often the forms of semiosis are conflated in the reality of the book market and can only be separated under analysis.

In order to be able to analyse the elements of cover design and the overall impression arising from them, I suggest differentiating between various levels of book design, following the approach of Stefan, Rothfos and Westerfeld (2006: 285–289). The pictorial level, with its visual and graphic elements, takes up considerable space and is therefore of high importance for the design of the front cover. It is not only the subject of the image that is critical here. The nature of the representation (e.g. photography, image, design) also proves to be »indicative of the content and mood« of the book (ibid.: 286). The textual level encompasses nearly every type of wording found on the front cover. The author's name and title are obviously prominent elements, but this level also includes other paratexts such as genre attributions. But since the text is only one component of the front cover design and interacts with im-

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ages, Gérard Genette's concept of paratext (1992), which also includes all the paratexts inside the book, does not seem very useful here. It does not allow a nuanced analysis of the overall design concept and the resulting overall impression.

Two further levels must be distinguished from the textual level: the publisher level and the marketing level. The former includes the name of the publisher and the company logo, as well as elements that can be attributed to a specific house style, or that occupy predefined positions, such as the ISBN or the barcode. As these elements also consist partly of text, they have to be differentiated from the textual level actively. The same can be said about the marketing level, which also combines textual and visual elements. These, however, have a clear advertising function – to spectacularly highlight the book's (potential) popularity – and therefore differ from the textual level. ›Second-order popularizations‹ are part of the marketing level. They can be quantitative in nature, e.g. pointing out how many people have already purchased the book. In Germany this is frequently achieved with a sticker indicating that the book has made it to the *Spiegel* magazine's list of bestselling books (cf. Werber et. al. 2023: 12).[7] Or they can be qualitative, e.g. quotations from well-known literary critics or popular Fantasy authors singing the book's praises. The overall picture conveyed by the various design elements on these different levels can be considered on an overarching conceptual level. This makes it possible to assess to what extent the whole transcends its parts, and what overall impression is created by the syntagmatic organization of the cover design. The idea is that differentiating between these levels will help to identify the »anatomy of a cover design« (Stefan et al. 2006: 285) and to clarify how meaning is generated in a specific case.

2. A Short History of the Cover Design of Epic Fantasy Literature (in Germany)

Within genres or subgenres, family resemblances in book design show which books belong together. Yet the design of book covers is highly culture- and time-specific and undergoes changes both over time and between countries or cultural communities. Trends dissipate, and design conventions as a whole change and influence the visual appearance of book displays. Despite and because of this relativity, it is possible to identify characteristics and developments in the design of Epic Fantasy. These can be followed across various phases, as will be outlined below with a focus on the front cover. This will allow us to trace the development of cover design in Fantasy

7 »Second-order popularization instead refers to practices in popularization that create popularity by determining and highlighting the fact that something already has received much attention. This occurs through the publication of quantified frameworks for displaying popularity, such as charts, rankings, and lists« (Werber et. al. 2023: 12).

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literature in Germany. I will concentrate on four representative examples: the front covers of popular Fantasy series by George R.R. Martin (*A Song of Ice and Fire*), Andrzej Sapkowski (*The Witcher*), Bernhard Hennen (*The Elven*) and Markus Heitz (*The Dwarves*).[8]

The first phase of cover design runs to around the turn of the millennium. This includes, for example, the cover designs for George R.R. Martin's Fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which was published in Germany (as *Das Lied von Eis und Feuer*) by Goldmann in the 1990s and later by Blanvalet. All the front covers in the series have a large illustration with a high-contrast colour scheme, combining an archaic-looking background (e.g. medieval-looking buildings or rugged natural landscapes far from civilization) with dynamic action in the foreground (e.g. warriors on horseback, flying dragons). On the cover of the second volume, for example, *Das Erbe von Winterfell* (The Inheritance of Winterfell, 1998) (Fig. 1),[9] a knight swings his axe to ward off a pack of wolves. His depiction is strikingly similar to Conan the Barbarian in the comic series of the same name,[10] and also to popular representations of Attila the Hun (cf. Däumer 2018: 45–64). His body, horse and weapon, all yellow-brown in colour, glow against the background colour scheme, which ranges from violet and pink to ice-blue. It is not possible to draw a link between the illustration and the narrative contained in this volume, since Khal Drogo, the character that this warrior most closely resembles, never fights against the direwolves of the icy north. The same goes for the cover illustrations of the rest of the series. They evoke links to the Middle Ages, by depicting architecture and equipment feature that can be perceived as medieval, but allow no relation of similarity to be drawn with the plot narrated in the books. On the textual level, the cover design of the second volume gives the title visual precedence over the author's name, which appears at the top edge, and the series title, which is placed at the bottom edge of the picture. The texts appear on a background resembling a gold plaque. On the publisher level, the Goldmann logo appears discreetly outside the thin, gold frame of the illustration. The only element on the marketing level is a price sticker, applied later and with little sensitivity to the image composition.

8 It is only possible to draw tentative links between this and the overall development of book design, as this would require a more extensive analysis of a larger body of material.

9 This does not correspond to the second volume in English, as the German edition divides the first English volume into two books.

10 This is confirmed by the results of a search for ›Conan‹ on the search platform cover-browser.com (cf. Cover Browser, online).

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Fig. 1: George R.R. Martin: Das Erbe von Winterfell. First German edition. Munich 1998
Fig. 2: Andrzej Sapkowski: Das Schwert der Vorsehung. First German edition. Munich 1998.

The prominence of the illustration in the front cover design can also be seen in the second volume of the *Witcher* series by Andrzej Sapkowski, *Das Schwert der Vorsehung* (1998; published in English as *Sword of Destiny*) (Fig. 2). It shows an adventus scene, separated by a frame from a neutral background. In front of a mountain landscape, a man and a woman – who can perhaps be vaguely associated with Geralt and Ciri – ride towards a figure waiting outside a city wall. The figure's staff and hat seem to suggest associations with a sorcerer. An additional element of the front cover design is a panorama, also enclosed in a frame, showing the silhouette of a mountain range and a dragon flying over it. The title, author name and series title are organized in the same way as on Martin's book. In this first phase of cover design, the focus is on an opulent, often high-contrast cover illustration, its dynamic scenery separated from a non-specific background by a frame. The images only evoke vague links – if any – to the books' characters and plot. The textual level, often in gold lettering, is integrated into this cover illustration and draws the eye to the book title first of all.[11]

11 Another example is the almost iconic cover design of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (German translation: *Die Nebel von Avalon*) (e.g. in the 1983 edition published by Krüger). Amidst a landscape of forest and mist, it shows a proud horsewoman carrying a shining sword. Above it, the prominent title appears in a golden-yellow frame.

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Fig. 3: Bernhard Hennen: Elfenwinter. Original edition. Munich 2006.
Fig. 4: Markus Heitz: Die Zwerge. Original edition. Munich 2004.

The vague display of a certain ›medievalness‹[12] in the book design becomes more specific and focused in the 2000s. We can therefore describe this period as the second phase. As shown by the front cover designs of Bernhard Hennen's *Elfenwinter* (2006, Fig. 3, published in English as *Elven Winter*) and Markus Heitz's *Die Zwerge* (2004, Fig. 4, published in English as *The Dwarves*), the panoramas give way to smaller image details, which are unframed and spread across the whole front cover. These focus on objects – often weapons –, which can be perceived as some sort of medieval, while the backgrounds show glimpses of mystical-archaic natural landscapes or architecture.[13] The axe and sword are highlighted by numerous points of light,

12 On the one hand ›Medievalness‹ can be understood as a strategy of displaying objects, tropes and motives that match with the popular knowledge of the medieval. On the other it also has to be conceptualised as a reception category, because the strategies try to create a felt authenticity for the recipients (Velten/Specht 2024).

13 The cover design of Stan Nicholls's *Die Orks* (2002, Heyne Verlag, translation of *Orcs: First Blood*) shows a castle in a rocky landscape in the distant background. The axe depicted in the foreground is, apart from a change in colour scheme, virtually identical to the one on the front cover of *Die Zwerge*. This example shows that design elements were often used more than once in this phase, presumably for financial reasons. Once Fantasy had become established as

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which give the weapons a metallic lustre and show up their ornamentation. The lustre corresponds to the colour scheme of the titles on the textual level: at Heyne and Piper, titles in the Fantasy category from this period are almost always in gold. In comparison, the author's name is much smaller and is usually placed to one side above the title, while the name of the publisher and the genre descriptor are positioned discreetly at the edges of the front cover. The cover design evolves from a vague scenery towards a fixation on neomedieval objects, highlighted by points of light and a metallic shine.

Fig. 5: Andrzej Sapkowski: Das Erbe der Elfen. New edition. Munich 2019
Fig. 6: Bernhard Hennen: Die Elfen. New edition. Munich 2014.

This fixation on objects continues in the third phase, beginning in the 2010s, during which backgrounds are gradually completely eliminated and replaced by expanses of colour or of material creating an impression of parchment,[14] stone or metal – as in Sapkowski's *Hexer* (*Witcher*) (2019; Fig. 5). In the case of Bernhard

a popular genre on the German book market, partly thanks to authors such as Heitz, Hennen and Nicholls, such exact reproductions of images more or less disappeared.

14 See the cover designs of the German editions of Martin's series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which have been published by blanvalet since 2010.

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Hennen's *Die Elfen* (2014, Fig. 6, published in English as *The Elven*), all that remains is an expanse of colour. This suppression of imagery in the design of the background focuses the gaze on the objects in the centre, which become larger and more richly detailed. Points of lustre, embossing and foil coating make handling the book a multisensory experience; an example is the 2019 cover of Sapkowski's *Erbe der Elfen* (published in English as *Blood of Elves*), shown below. This third phase constitutes, for the time being, the end of this evolution of book cover design, from paintings to extremely detailed designs combined with flat backgrounds. The latter now encompass the whole cover (front cover – spine – back cover), making the design of the cover much more unified. The textual level and publisher level are no longer separate and are now integrated into the pictorial level. The result is an overall conception that also increase's the book's »online compatibility«, optimizing the commodity for digital distribution channels (Wilking 2021b: 16). For online commerce, cover designs must be clearly structured and easy to recognize even when reduced to a very small size (ibid.: 16–19).

At the beginning of the evolution traced above, the lack of connection between the cover design and the narrative showed that the cover barely functioned as a secondary sign system. Now, however, the swords of the elven, the coats of arms of the Westerosi dynasties and the amulets of the witchers – all important components of each narrative – are given concrete visual form. Thanks to these relations of similarity, the book cover now generates meaning to a much greater extent than in the 1990s. A crucial part of this is that the cover design is governed by the neomedieval – the eclectic, transformative – style in which the novels use medieval components from society, culture and literature.

3. A Neomedieval Aesthetics of the Image and the Book

It has become clear that the cover design of popular Epic Fantasy is becoming more holistic, that it builds up meaning through relations of similarity, and that its focus is on the staging of ›medievalness‹. This can be observed in more detail when we study the anatomy of a specific cover: the first volume of the *Zwerge* (*Dwarves*) series by Markus Heitz, in the 2016 edition (Fig. 7). The front cover of the 2004 edition, also published by Piper, already shows an axe which appears to have been driven into the grass beneath it. Flames leap up from the shaft of the axe and seem to devour the monstrous chimera above it. The title is printed in golden letters above the image, and the author's name appears in much smaller silver letters above the title.

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Fig. 7: Markus Heitz: Die Zwerge. Unabridged paperback edition. Munich 2016.

Although the 2016 front cover shows a double-headed axe (labrys) as well, there have been substantial changes. On the pictorial level, the centre is entirely occupied by the axe, with its detailed ornamentation. The black background is slightly lighter around the axe, giving the impression that it is illuminated by the weapon's lustre. The shaft and blades of the axe are decorated with an intricate design in gleaming gold, with similar details in glossy black on the blades. The polished cutting edges of the axe show indentations, which can be interpreted either as signs of wear on the blade or decorative runes. The bottom end of the shaft is a knob with two small hooks sticking out of it. Overall, the wealth of detail on the labrys defines the whole front cover design and highlights its extreme artificiality. Embossed elements on the cover make all these details – from the shine to the structure of the ornamentation – a multisensory experience. The activation of multiple senses ensures a sensory coding in the brain, which intensifies the effect of the book's physical form (cf. Maisch/Herbst 2009: 165).

On the front cover, embossing as well accentuates the author's name and the title, which dominate the centre of the textual level. The size ratio between the author's name and the title has been reversed in comparison to the 2004 edition. The author's name, printed in large, silver letters, defines the lower half of the front cover. His first name and surname enclose the much smaller title, which reflects the gold colouring of the axe's ornamentation. On the publisher level, the Piper logo appears at the top right-hand edge of the front cover and is adapted in a way that doesn't clash with the colour scheme of the cover design – a common problem in the covers from the first

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phase. For the display in the bookshop the familiar red ›Spiegel Bestseller‹ sticker is added to the front cover, often right next to the shaft of the axe. This is second-order popularization, serving to highlight the book's popularity and thus attract more attention (cf. Werber et. al. 2023: 10–14). In this case the overall conception of the front cover design also means that there is enough space for the later addition of such second-order popularizations, so that they fit homogeneously into the overall impression rather than disrupting it, as in the awkwardly placed price sticker on the above-mentioned volume by Martin. This tendency to leave space for subsequent proofs of popularity when designing the cover can also be observed in many other cover designs in popular Fantasy literature, including the *Witcher* series.

The 2016 German edition of the first volume of Heitz's *Dwarves* series demonstrates – particularly in comparison with the previous edition of 2004 – the increasing fixation of Fantasy book design on equipment features, that can be perceived as medieval while they their depiction is combined with modern aesthetics. The choice of the object is not random. By selecting the axe and its design, the front cover generates meaning in several respects. It corresponds to the title and refers to genre conventions of Fantasy. Not only have dwarves undisputedly been one of the population groups of secondary Fantasy worlds since Tolkien, if not before, but the axe is well known to be their weapon of choice: »Gimli the Dwarf alone wore openly a shirt of steel rings, for Dwarves make light of burdens, and in his belt was a broad bladed axe« (Tolkien 2019: 364). The secondary sign of the book design generates meaning by referring to conventionalized genre attributions and stores of knowledge, and by updating and illustrating them. The prominence of the author's name is also part of this ›secondary process of semanticization‹ (cf. Fleuster 2022: 59). Markus Heitz's two Fantasy series (*The Dwarves, The Legends of the Älfar*) are not only very popular, but were also among the first original German-language works in the Fantasy market, and helped to make the genre popular in German-language literature after the commercial success of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films. Heitz's popularity is therefore used for advertising purposes. The front cover design presents him as a central representative of the genre. His name is both a statement about the book's genre and a promise of quality, and thus has a similar function to well-known and respected brand names (cf. D'Astous 2006: 135f.; Phillips 2007: 24–26). Ultimately, the author's fame and the displaying of this fame are one of the decisive selling points of a book, alongside the cover (cf. Clement et al. 2008: 769). In the case of Markus Heitz, the cover design indexicalizes not only his popularity, but also the product and market contexts of the Fantasy genre. The privileging of the author's name over the title is matched by the less obtrusive publisher level. While well-known publishers such as Suhrkamp or Diogenes often emphasize their own identity with distinctive cover designs, the Piper logo, integrated into the colour scheme of the front cover, is much more discreet.

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Besides these conventionalized attributions and stores of knowledge, which refer to the genre and to Tolkien's works as its founding texts, the cover design generates meaning with the image of the axe because it initializes a relation of similarity between the book cover and the text. The quest of Heitz's protagonist Tungdil Goldhand, which is narrated in the first volume, consists mainly of gathering the necessary components to forge a battle axe. This axe is required to eliminate the evil sorcerer Nod'ônn (Nudin), who is threatening the peoples of the Geborgenes Land (Sheltered Land). »The blade of this axe must be made of the purest, hardest steel, with diamonds encrusting the bit and an alloy of every known precious metal filling the inlay and the runes. The spurs should be hewn from stone and the haft sculpted from wood of the sigurdaisy tree. The ax must be forged in a furnace lit with the fiercest of all flames and its name shall be Keenfire« (Heitz 2009: 331–332). True, the axe depicted on the front cover is not a battle axe, and the diamond-encrusted bit is missing, but an astonishing number of the distinguishing features of Keenfire appears in this labrys – even the black metal known as tionium, used for decoration.[15]

Thus the book design not only depicts a weapon that can be perceived as medieval, but gives centre stage to a powerful medieval like object. When it comes to creating this relation of similarity between the inside and outside of the novel, the divergences between them are negligible. The book presents itself on the tables of bookshops with Keenfire, the axe that Tungdil must forge to complete his quest. This shows that the book cover as a secondary sign, while not delivering any meaning that changes the novel, has a significant role in framing it.

A look at the back cover confirms the assumption that, in the case of Heitz's *Dwarves*, the secondary sign of the book cover generates its meaning primarily through relations of similarity and conventionalization. Not only is the double-headed axe of the front cover depicted again, but a flail in the same design is added. This weapon then dominates the front cover of the third volume of the series in this edition. On the textual level, we read: »They are the toughest heroes from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*: dwarves are small, bearded, and seem to be born with the ability to swing an axe. But how does a dwarf really live, think and fight?« (Heitz 2016: back cover). Here a careful balance is maintained between positioning Heitz's works within the history of the genre and emphasizing their innovation. The paratext suggests that Heitz's novels are direct successors of Tolkien and, at the same time, offer new insights into the neomedieval world of the dwarves. While the *Spiegel* sticker is only added to the cover design after production (though its position seems to have been planned in the overall conception of the design), the paratext of the back cover also refers to Markus Heitz's ›bestselling saga‹ and spectacularly highlights the popularity of the series and the author. The term ›saga‹ is typical

15 »Dragon Fire [the forge in which Keenfire must be forged; TS] was powerful enough to melt tionium, the black element created by Tion« (Heitz 2009: 335).

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of the genre and is used to refer to an extensive Epic Fantasy series (ibid.). The semanticizing processes of the front cover thus continue on the back cover. At the same time, they are concretized: the indirect references to the genre and Tolkien are echoed and explicitly formulated on the textual level.

The spine of the book also plays an important role for the cover design, in two respects: not only does it enable the product to attract attention on the shelves of bookshops; it also represents the book on the bookshelf at home. For series, the spines of the individual volumes and their design are of particular relevance, as the spine design serves to promote or present the books collectively. In some cases, the cover design extends beyond the individual volume and reveals a ›series anatomy‹. This occurs when design features are repeated or varied, thus presenting the series – in terms of book aesthetics – as a cohesive oeuvre. The design of the individual volumes differs in the details, but the overall conception – the interaction between the pictorial, textual, publishing and marketing levels – remains constant. For the *Dwarves* series, this means that the fixation and focusing on a object, that is assumed to be somehow medieval, remains. In the following volumes the double-headed axe is replaced by a hammer (volume 2) and a flail (volume 3). The weapons always have the same shiny, black-gold design as the labrys. The textual, publishing and marketing levels do not change their distribution on the front or back cover.

Fig. 8: Markus Heitz: Die Zwerge. 4 volumes. Munich 2016.

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Besides this design framework, which clearly shows that the volumes belong together as a series, the design of the spines ensures that the series can be recognized as such when standing on a bookshelf. In the case of *Dwarves*, the book spines, when placed next to each other, show the bottom half of the double-headed axe from the front cover of the first volume (Fig. 8). A section of this image takes up the top half of each book spine, while the title and author's name appear below this in a similar size ratio to the front cover. The 2019 German edition of Andrzej Sapkowski's *Witcher* series follows a comparable principle: when lined up, the books' spines show a witcher's amulet in the centre, with its glossy metallic tendrils stretching out to the beginning and end of the series.

Yet normally such a series anatomy is an indication of the canonization of works or authors as part of high culture. Or it may be the distinguishing feature of a prestigious publishing house. An example of this is the *edition suhrkamp* design by Willy Fleckhaus, which – according to the publisher's homepage – gives the series »cult status« (Suhrkamp|Insel Verlag: edition suhrkamp series). By adopting specific series anatomies, popular (Fantasy) literature is appropriating the aesthetic design principles of high culture. A literary genre that high culture has long viewed as ›trash‹ or ›throwaway literature‹ is popularizing a signum of high-culture book aesthetics and – in the area of series design – blurring the boundaries between ›high‹ and ›low‹. Thus, a structural similarity between popular and high culture can be observed on the level of book design (of series). John Fiske (1992) identified a comparable structural similarity regarding the acquisition of capital in fan communities.

At the same time, the series anatomy also resembles popular culture formats which appear in series.[16] One example from German culture is the ›BRAVO-Starschnitt‹: for several decades, the teen magazine *Bravo* published segments of a life-size image of a singer or film star, which readers could collect and paste together. Another example are the Donald Duck pocket books (known in Germany as the Lustige Taschenbücher). In both cases, buyers who purchase every issue are rewarded by the emergence of a complete picture on the bookshelf. This encourages practices of popular collecting. On the one hand, it offers a record of what one has bought and/or read (documentary collecting); on the other hand, it highlights the aesthetic experience of this activity (aesthetic collecting) (see Nast 2017: 292–303). Thanks to an overall aesthetic concept, products that might previously have disappeared under the bed or been discarded as ›trivial‹ literature now become fit for presentation on the buyer's bookshelf.

16 The relevance of seriality and the resulting impetus for collecting become particularly apparent, as Mirjam Nast (Nast 2017: 303–306) demonstrates looking at the extremely long-running series *Perry Rhodan*, a popular series of Heftromane (small-format, cheaply produced paperbacks, similar to penny dreadfuls or dime novels).

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The design of the double-headed axe thus becomes the signum of Heitz's series. The potential for secondary semanticization offered by the labrys, which includes conventionalized genre attributions and references and relations of similarity to the narrative, is exploited – in terms of the aesthetics of the book – for the design of the whole series. When it comes to ›long-distance effect‹ – for example on a customer strolling through the bookshop – it is primarily Keenfire that draws attention and attracts the wandering gaze (cf. Scheifele 2020: 11). The author's name and the title will only be discernible on closer inspection. Thus the labrys, referring to the genre, its founding father Tolkien as well as to the weapon's own power in Heitz's novel, becomes the defining design element for the anatomy of the series and its presentation on the shelf.

4. The Fantasy Novel as a Neomedieval Commodity

Like other genres, the book design of popular Fantasy is marked by striking family resemblances. In a book market characterized by quality uncertainty and almost endless choice, these resemblances offer points of orientation and promises for buyers. In the area of Fantasy, such family resemblances often find expression in dark colour schemes and depictions of gleaming objects that can be perceived as medieval. Although design conventions change over time, the use of neomedieval elements has been a feature of the German Fantasy book market from the beginning. These objects are either attributed to the Middle Ages or can be perceived as medieval. They include architectural structures such as castles or city walls, and equipment features or weapons associated with knights, such as swords, lances or axes. They have been part of the pictorial level from the start, but over the different phases of Fantasy book design they have become more and more central, and have superseded cover illustrations showing whole panoramas and movements. The evolution from painting to design also means that expansive background images have been replaced by plain expanses of colour or the simulation of natural materials (e.g. stone, parchment). On the pictorial level, this focus on objects, that somehow refer to the medieval but are designed according to modern aesthetics, makes it possible to create elaborate designs for the objects depicted. The overall concept that emerges helps to attract buyers' attention in the bookshop and also facilitates the digital distribution of the product, where the front cover must be easy to decipher even in thumbnail size on the screen.

Its design turns the book cover into a secondary sign system, which does not change the meaning of the primary sign system of the novel but adds meanings to it. These frame the use and reading of the novel and are often the reason why it is purchased or read in the first place. Using the first volume of Markus Heitz's *Dwarves* series as an example, we have seen that this meaning is generated in dif-

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ferent ways. Firstly, the double-headed axe in the centre of the front cover design generates meaning as a neomedieval object symbol: evoking a reference structure made up of dwarves, axes and Tolkien, the cover design adopts conventionalized genre attributions and refers to genre-constituting stores of knowledge. These visual and textual references on both the front and back cover position Heitz's novel as a successor of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, while simultaneously presenting *Dwarves* as an independent contribution to the Epic Fantasy genre. Secondly, the centrality of the labrys – a key object for the diegesis and the quest structure of the novel – in the design of the front cover and of the series creates a meaningful relation of similarity between the cover and the text. The cover design of the *Dwarves* volume is characterized by a neomedieval visual aesthetics. This has a major influence on its secondary processes of semanticization and is therefore expanded into a series design. The design principle thus evolves into a neomedieval aesthetics of the book. The secondary sign system of the book cover is, in the case of Markus Heitz's novel, a particularly neomedieval secondary sign system.

Furthermore, the series design of popular Fantasy identifies individual volumes as parts of a larger oeuvre, and uses features of book design that are actually associated with high culture. At the same time the image running across the books' spines, requiring the full series for completion, encourages popular practices of aesthetic collecting. The presentation of such a collection can then serve to acquire cultural capital. The Fantasy novel is identified as an appealing and noteworthy consumer item in terms of the aesthetics of the book. An integral component of this aesthetic of the book is a neomedieval one. The cover design offers a sophisticated presentation, and at the same time a tactile experience, of these elements. Thus, the emphasis on the medieval, which is detached from its original context and combined with a modern design proves to be an important marketing strategy for Epic Fantasy, which simultaneously raises its status in popular culture. A product that is noticed by many is given an elaborate aesthetic design, identifying it as a neomedieval product. Its status is then further emphasized by second-order popularizations. The Fantasy novel thus becomes a holistically designed commodity whose appropriation and transformation of medieval inventories and narratives can be discerned not only on the level of the primary sign system, but also on that of the secondary sign system. The aesthetics of the book, as shown in these examples of Epic Fantasy, are the connecting point between book design and book text, and play a key role in transforming the novel into a fully neomedieval commodity.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: George R.R. Martin: *Das Erbe von Winterfell*. First German edition. Munich 1998. © Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag. Cover design/illustration: © Design Team Munich, Schlück/Beekman.

Fig. 2: Andrzej Sapkowski: *Das Schwert der Vorsehung*. First German edition. Munich 1998. © Wilhelm Heyne Verlag München. Cover design: © Atelier Ingrid Schütz, Munich.

Fig. 3: Bernhard Hennen: *Elfenwinter*. Original edition. Munich 2006. © Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, Munich. Cover design/illustration: © Michael Welply/Nele Schütz Design.

Fig. 4: Markus Heitz: *Die Zwerge*. Original edition. Munich 2004. © Wilhem Heyne Verlag, Munich. Cover design/illustration: Nele Schütz Design/Didier Graffet, Bargelonne.

Fig. 5: Andrzej Sapkowski: *Das Erbe der Elfen*. New edition. Munich 2019. © dtv Verlagsgesellschaft. Cover design and illustration: © Isabelle Hirtz (Inkcraft), Melanie Korte (Inkcraft), Oswin Neumann.

Fig. 6: Bernhard Hennen: *Die Elfen*. New edition. Munich 2014. © Wilhelm Heyne Verlag. Cover design: © Isabelle Hirtz (Inkcraft), Melanie Miklitza (Inkcraft).

Fig. 7: Markus Heitz: *Die Zwerge*. Unabridged paperback edition. Munich 2016. © Piper Verlag. Cover design/illustration: www.buerosued.de.

Fig. 8: Markus Heitz: *Die Zwerge*. 4 volumes. Munich 2016. © Piper Verlag Cover design/illustration: www.buerosued.de.

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Medievalist Aesthetics and Marketing Strategies

Some Thoughts on Cover Design from the 1980s to the Present

Miriam Strieder

1. A Public Introduction to Medieval(ist) Aesthetics

Were you to conduct a spontaneous survey in the streets and ask people what their associations are when they hear the term medieval or Middle Ages, the answers would probably include some of the following: dark, dirty, Black Death, witch trials, crusades, knights, and castles. Medievalists may write against this image of the medieval period but the associations of a dark, dirty and violent period prevail in the public mind. This leads to the question, why everything remotely medieval[1] holds such a fascination for people from all walks of life and age groups[2]. This somewhat unholy fascination with the medieval is probably rooted in the other extreme of its perception, that of idealisation: If you just ask enough people, some will come up with ideas of an easier, less complicated form of lifestyle, of courtly romances and minnesong, beautifully illustrated manuscripts, impressive Gothic cathedrals and intricately embroidered dresses that are not only on display but also available for dressing up (cf. Brown 2023, online) at various medieval sites.

Because of the remains of the medieval period readily available on most people's doorstep in Europe and mostly easily accessible through exhibitions, guided and self-guided tours the time period between Antiquity and Modernity is readily on everybody's mind. Its material culture and remains, from architectural features,

1 Velten has argued that the medieval period in the perception of a wider audience has the tendency to draw in other historical periods as well so that medievalism actually consists of more than just the time period that is deemed medieval in a more fact-based approach. Cf. Velten 2018: 9–20, especially hypothesis 2: »Das ‚gefrässige Mittelalter': die Kolonisierung des Vergangenen und Mythischen«, p.17.

2 Young has drawn attention to the whiteness of medievalism by stating that »popular cultural re-imaginings of the European Middle Ages almost exclusively feature characters who are white.« (Young 2017, online). She also argues in her book that »[F]antasy has the reputation for being an eurocentric genre, that is, one which is by, for, and about White people« (Young 2016: 1), which is even more true for medievalist Fantasy, although new tendencies such as the cast of The Rings of Power point to changing tides.

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book culture, textile remains, to weaponry etc. and therefore its ideas about design and aesthetics are not only highly visible but also valued by many which leads to reproductions and inspirations for what might be called medievalist merchandise ranging from tea towels to facsimile editions, from bookends with Gothic elements to shields with crests for kids to play with.

This ready availability of the medieval period as a whole also means that forms of knowledge about its culture, history and other elements are believed to be just as readily available, which results in attributions such as mentioned above. The public opinion of the medieval period oscillates between demonisation and idealisation, very much depending on which exhibition, film or book one has seen or read last about a topic gauged as medieval.

2. The Medieval Period as Popular Culture

The above mentioned ready availability of the medieval period through various forms of reception, ranging from visiting historical sites to engaging in computer games, its openness to different topics and periods as well, its remoteness in terms of cultural grounds and practices and therefore its interpretability has resulted in the tendency that especially the medieval period means different things for different ethnical, political and cultural groups. As it is readily accessible via a range of different means the medieval period has lent itself to an ongoing hype which has further spiralled the idea of what is actually medieval. As the period itself is perceived as so vast and diverse, without a clear start or end, adjoining periods get more and more subsumed in the public opinion of what is actually considered medieval (cf. Velten 2018: 17) which means that topics, settings, persons or events with which to generate content that may no longer be genuinely medieval, will not be exhausted anytime soon.

The immense presence of the medieval in popular culture has various impacts on research and teaching in a university context and brings its own benefits and challenges. It also proves that a period where people perceive the possibility of their own interpretations, the experience of familiar strangeness and stark contrasts in its general perception, offers a huge marketing potential for all things medieval(ist).

3. Sales Strategies

The question then, is how to sell the medieval period to the broader public in various forms? As the period comes with a perceived clear cut aesthetic tradition, it is easy to use this as a foundation and tweak it according to the needs of the product. Once the branding as medieval is established, more of the same can easily be produced, which

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allows for a high recognition value of the product. Although medievalist aesthetics seems to be easily recognisable by the broader public, it appears that currently there are several forms of perceived medievalist aesthetics on the market. The aesthetically pleasing, colourful and bright medievalist designs are sharply contrasted by dark, dirty and aesthetically apparently cruder designs while everything in between these two extremes also exists and is used to literally illustrate and highlight specific characteristics of a product. Often a few design elements suffice to brand a product as belonging to the medievalist hype.

In terms of book marketing, the following paper is concerned with hard-copy books, electronic versions shall not be in the focus of this paper, particularly because the novels discussed here were published before eBooks were available. Although the second media revolution is well under way, the printed book is by no means dead or a fossilized relict. Quite on the contrary, books deemed as beautiful are easily sold and book artists and publishing houses alike even produced editions de luxe of well-loved classics or books that have become iconic within the last few years[3].

On these grounds in the following cover designs shall be examined which range from the early 1980s to the present. After discussing the genre distinctions of Fantasy and historical novels, methods and types of 'medievalisation' as well as medievalist aesthetics, the final key case study will address cover designs for the trilogy *Down the Long Wind* by Gillian Bradshaw, first published between 1980 and 1982. This paper is concerned with how designs reflect on the development of the medievalist hype, the growing and changing knowledge about the medieval period, and its fluctuation between idealisation and demonisation of the period. It further highlights aesthetic traditions within the reception of the medieval period from Romanticism on and tries to come to terms with the genre of Fantasy encroaching on and using elements of the historical novel set in the medieval period.

Although books with a medievalist topic, including thus historical novels as well as Fantasy, are part of the medievalist hype sketched above, marketing is still part of the sales strategies of the big publishing houses, even for big names such as Ken Follett and his *Knightsbridge-series*. The German *Börsenblatt*, interviewing Marco Schneiders, head of the publishing house Bastei Lübbe, points to this fact when talking about the success of the prequel of *The Pillars of the Earth*:

> Was auffällt, ist, dass das Äußere des Prequels sich deutlich von den bisherigen Bänden unterscheidet. Warum? [Verlagsleiter Marco] Schneiders [vom Bastei Lübbe Verlag] antwortet: ‚Wir haben uns bewusst von der bisher typischen und ge-

3 One recent example is Mina Lima, a design studio collaborating with Harper Collins to produce high-quality and aesthetically sophisticated editions of classics of children's literature such as *Peter Pan* or *The Wizard of Oz* but also of the Harry Potter series. Already printed books may even be customized, for example by fore-edge painting such as by Maisie Matilda.

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> wohnten Farbwelt (Beige) verabschiedet. Es wurde Zeit für einen neuen Auftritt – und wir wollten auch mit der Gestaltung in Schwarz allen Follett-Fans verdeutlichen, dass sie dieses Buch bisher garantiert noch nicht in ihrem Bücherregal haben. (Glatthor 2020, online)
> It is remarkable that the design of the prequel differs greatly from the other volumes. Why? [Publishing house manager Marco] Schneider [from Bastei Lübbe publishing house] answers: 'We deliberately departed from the up to now typical and usual colour coding (beige). It was time for a new look – and we also wanted to show all the Follett-fans by the design that they for sure do not yet own this book. (Transl. M.S.)

Instead of more of the same which was employed for the other volumes of the *Knightsbridge-saga*, the German publishing house – as well as the English – has made the decision to forgo the well-established design and thus the recognition-value, and create an innovative design which illustrates that the brand Follett-Knightsbridge is well known and customers need no longer be lead by a familiar design. Quite on the contrary, the newness of the product demands a new book jacket in order to avoid confusion. This illustrates how important marketing considerations for the cover design still are and what aims and expectations are connected with the respective design.

4. Historical Novels and Fantasy as Medievalist Genres: Overlaps and Boundaries

Ken Follett's *Knightsbridge-saga* is branded as a historical novel and contains no or very little fantastical elements. Yet the genres of historical novel and Fantasy hold the biggest share within the medievalist hype and therefore a distinction between the two genres is necessary to make while it also seems clear that there are overlapping characteristics.

The *Handbuch der literarischen Gattungen* explains that the historical novels deals with »authentische historische Ereignisse, Orte, Personen und Verhältnisse in unterschiedlichen Graden der Fiktionalisierung« (›authentic historical events, places, persons and circumstances in different degrees of fictionalisation‹ Transl. M.S.) (Lampart 2009: 360). It further points to the fact that the question of what is actually fact and what is fiction is what constitutes the genre (cf. ibid.). This field of controversy between fact and fiction opens up numerous possibilities to gauge what is real and what is invented by the author. Depending on the matter of the novel, this assessment done by the reader gets more complicated and complex. The Arthurian legends provide an excellent example of this because the debate on whether there was a historical inspiration to the fictional King Arthur of Camelot, *primus inter pares*

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of the illustrious Knights of the Round Table, is basically ongoing since the monks of Glastonbury allegedly found the grave of the legendary king in 1191. Typically for historical novels may also be the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, to speak with Bloch: Characters that do not share the same lifetime or have for sure never met, can be brought together (cf. ibid.: 362). Armitt provides a definition of the Fantasy genre that not only encompasses literary texts but also visual and/or audio forms of art. She states:

> All these texts and narratives deal in juxtaposition of competing worlds, wherein one world, purportedly representing 'reality', is left behind in preference for another which is unknown and 'foreign' in the sense of being strange, fabulous or grotesque. The laws of physics, logic, time, physiognomy, life and death and/or geography are usually subverted in preference for a narrative vision which is improbable, impossible, or beyond belief. (Armitt 2020: 3)

Armitt also emphasises the fact that Fantasy lends itself to forming »sub-genres [… such as] the fairy story, quest myth, fable, epic Fantasy […]« (ibid.) which fosters the kind of overlap between the genres, which is not restricted to the historical novel and Fantasy. The strange, fabulous or grotesque world, which lies at the heart of Armitt's definition is generated by the »marvellous« (ibid.: 5), a term hailing from Todorov and being used in discussing medieval literature as well.

Mendlesohn and James also provide a definition of Fantasy that allows an application across various artforms. They emphasis that Fantasy is based on the presence of the »Unmöglichen und Unerklärlichen« (›impossible and inexplicable‹ Transl. M.S.) (Mendlesohn and James 2017: 11) which elegantly excludes Science Fiction, which often blurs the lines of the genre. Furthermore they also point at the aspect of audience and sales and thus state that »[v]iele Leute glauben, dass man Fantasy an ihren Titelbildern erkennen kann. Ein Drache oder Zauberer ist für gewöhnlich ein brauchbares Indiz; aber genauso ein halbnackter, das Schwert schwingender Barbar (ob nun männlich oder weiblich).« (ibid.: 13–14.) »Many people believe that you can recognize Fantasy by its cover images. A dragon or wizard is usually a useful indicator; but so is a half-naked, sword-wielding barbarian (whether male or female).« (Transl. M.S.) Their rather laconic approach proves, despite its ironic undertones, that cover design is important in order to identify the genre correctly which has been able to resist clear-cut definitions quite successfully. Therefore in the following, a short overview of means and method to 'medievalise' or 'fantasise' a cover will be introduced.

Both the historical novel and the genre of Fantasy may, depending on the particular work in question, be subsumed under the umbrella term of speculative fiction. Readers of both genres, who follow Hartley's dictum: »The past is a foreign land, they do things differently there«, easily see that the fantastic world that is stressed in the

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above introduced definitions is evident in both genres. But similarities extend beyond that, depending on the way the story is presented, the protagonists as fictional or historical characters, and of course the actual content: If Martin Luther's experience with the thunderstorm of Stotternheim in July 1505 is told with actual fire-breathing dragons coming from an underworld while a fairy version of St Anna interferes and rescues the reformer, then for all its historicity this event belongs in the realms of Fantasy. Therefore, boundaries between the two genres are fluid and each novel needs to be carefully evaluated with regards to assignment of genre. For Arthurian fiction such as Bradshaw's trilogy *Down the Long Wind* the decision is notoriously difficult to make and might be impossible in the end. In the following, her work will be treated as Fantasy, although her strange and fabulous world only plays a minor role within the narrative.

5. Types of 'Medievalisation' Employed within the Framework of Cover Design

It has been established that in order to market a product appropriately and to reach the relevant target group(s) it needs to be recognisable as belonging to the broad and relatively vague attribution of medieval(ist). So, the question is how to design a product, specifically a book cover, that it is gauged as medieval by a broader audience who might or might not have further knowledge and experience of medievalist content. Three main devices are available for the design of a book cover, which also needs to treat the thin line of making it clear to which genre the product belongs: colour-coding, font, and, most importantly, motif. These shall be explored in the following.

5.1 Colour-Coding

As the interview with Marco Schneiders already hinted at, specific colours seem to exist that are connected with the medieval period – beige and nuances between eggshell and brown suggest the great age of the writing material and if a structure within the colour is added, it might hint at parchment or very old and crinkly paper.

Another popular colour for medievalist designs in general is red. The colour, depending on the shade, may remind the audience of dried blood which evokes the dark Middle Ages with the violent confrontations of various kinds. Furthermore it might be assumed that the broader public is still aware of red as a royal colour symbolising rule and power and thus pointing to the hierarchically structured society of the medieval period[4].

4 Examples for red as a colour of power, kingship but also violence are numerous in medieval texts and illustrations and may easily be traced back to Roman traditions. But also in the

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Yellow and blue are also used, the first often substituted by gold. Blue, however, is used less frequently, maybe because of blue also being rare and precious in the medieval period and therefore, for medievalist designs less frequently available. If blue is used, it can denote the big distance, both in terms of time and culture, between our own time and the medieval period – a striking example is here the design of the covers of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Avalon-saga*[5]. Gold, with its easy connection to preciousness and therefore power[6], is often employed for the lettering of title and/or name of the author. Typically, it is only used sparsely to highlight specific elements within the cover design such as artefacts that would characteristically be made of the precious metal, for example a crown or coins.

White appears less frequently, although silver can be popular within the Fantasy genre, for example a cover of a German hardcover edition of Walter Moers' *Rumo oder die Wunder im Dunkeln* is mainly designed in silver. Black, however, has especially become popular in the last few years as the Fantasy genre received more and more attention by customers. In terms of associations it opens up limitless possibilities, from the dark and dirty Middle Ages where death and obscurity reign supreme. Connections with the Black Death, decay and mysteries in the dark are easily established already on the cover[7].

Green may be used in order to evoke associations of the perceived closeness to (and the constant fight against) nature of the medieval period. Especially books that deal with natural remedies of the medieval period, for example on Hildegard von Bingen, may employ this colour while works of fiction, no matter whether a historical novel or a work of the Fantasy genre, use green in order to illustrate landscape

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Celtic tradition, red is a colour carrying a range of meanings: When King Pwyll for example meets the King of the Otherworld in the First Branch of the Mabinogion, the audience is first informed of supernatural proceedings by the colouring of the hunting dogs, which are white with bright red ears.

5 Blue, in the medieval manuscript tradition the most expensive colour because it was gained from Lapislazuli, is often associated with the cloak of the Virgin Mary. In Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, a Blue Knight, Sir Persant, hails from India, associating the colour blue with the Far East as an exotic land of marvellous riches. He is furthermore the most powerful of the four brothers (the Black Knight, the Red Knight and the Green Knight, who is not to be confused with Gawain's opponent in the below mentioned *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) since he brings the biggest retinue with him. Cf. Malory VII.12.

6 Cf. the Middle High German connection in the word *rîch*, denoting both political power and material wealth.

7 While contemporary audiences generally associate white with cleanness and innocence and black with dirtiness and sin, medieval audiences would not necessarily make such connections: In Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, the ideal knight Sir Galahad is associated with a white shield with a blood-red cross, which was indeed painted with the blood of Joseph of Arimathea, but in one adventure of Sir Bors within the Sangrail-stories he sees a black bird which is later identified with the Holy Church (Malory XVI.7 and XVI.13).

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and untamed nature, especially forests as important settings[8]. If the forest is not green but of an unusual or even unnatural colour, this also may serve as an indicator of genre on the cover – the absence of green where it is to be expected can also be used within the cover design.

Particularly within the Fantasy genre, the colours may vary and evoke different associations of the target audience. Purple and pink, far from colours of the church, are therefore used as well and may, especially in connection with elements of the genre of romance, hint at mystery and romantic entanglements, for example in *Witches of Wick* by Annie Waye. Covers signalling a book from the Fantasy genre are often kept in one or two main colours, which might be used in different hues to generate depth and shades (cf. Epubli, online).

As became clear, medieval symbolism of colours plays only a marginal role in today's perception. The mainly tetradic colour scheme of red, blue, gold and black may appear in stark nuances as well as subdued tinges – depending on the intensity it may hint at the lively and colourful medieval period with a wide range of emotions and therefore approachability or associations are fabricated of an era buried in the shadows of the past which is forever lost to the present. The differentiation of warm and cold colours only plays a minor role but may be employed in order to evoke the rather cosy Middle Ages depicted prominently in William Morris' *News from Nowhere* or to encode the culturally and emotionally distant medieval period.

All in all, this use of colours seems rather traditional, not necessarily because the content of the books are rather traditional but because easy and fitting associations have to be made by the first glimpse of the cover, which then stimulates further decisions such as reading the blurb, opening the book etc. Colour-Coding is therefore an important element of the cover design and needs to be carefully considered, as potential customers only spend a few seconds examining the cover before they either move to the next title or engage further with the product.

5.2 Font

With regards to fonts, clearly some forms are identified by the broader public as medieval. This can be easily illustrated when looking at advertisement for medievalist events such as re-enactments, medieval markets etc. Certain features in a font are perceived as decidedly medieval even without any prior knowledge of medieval

8 The colour green plays a major role in the Middle English verse romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the antagonist of Gawain sports this colour in all sorts of equipment. This unusual colouring has given rise to much debate, ranging from identifying the Green Knight with the Green Man, often seen depicted in bosses in churches, or an incarnation of an old deity of nature and vegetation. It has also been suggested that the colour green is a misunderstanding, cf. Nickel, Helmut: »Why was the Green Knight Green?« In: Arthurian Interpretations 2/2 (1988), pp. 58–64.

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fonts[9]. The first and probably most important criterion is that of blackletter, which is interpreted as genuinely medieval. Fonts with all caps or rather majuscules, in some instances with serifs evoke the impression of age, handwriting, and calligraphy, which have the tendency to be connected with medieval book art. When looking at relevant webpages, for example onlineprinters.de/magazin/mittelalter-schrift/, it is easy to identify these characteristics: Three of the fonts listed there, namely Morris Roman, Vinque, and Hadley, point directly to William Morris and art nouveau. No matter how medieval the fonts may appear, they need to fulfil two more functions for a book cover: readability for a contemporary audience and a long range effect – blackletter and serifs provide these only partly and are therefore only employed to such an extent that the association with the medieval period can be made by customers. If this association can be fabricated by other means, these will have preference over a barely readable, although genuine medieval, font.

The Fantasy genre also resorts to fonts with a medieval tinge in order to stress the links to the past of the tale, the secrecy and mystery surrounding the content of the book or highlighting the preciousness of the book. This may be emphasised by using gold or silver for the writing suggesting quality and valuableness.

5.3 Motif

The last and most important point when examining cover design is naturally the motif: What is depicted and in which manner? At least five important sources for motifs can be identified: a) architecture or architectural elements, b) roles generally associated with a medieval setting: kings, knights errant, damsels (in distress), vagabonds, sorcerers, minstrels etc. c) elements of a fantastical medieval period such as dragons or other fantastical beasts, fays etc. d) objects that bear a close association with the medieval period such as a sword, shield or crown, and lastly e) symbols decoding medievalist content such as the cross of the crusaders, (pseudo-)runes, crests of arms, real or fictional, etc.

Most of the above-mentioned elements can be placed in the foreground of the cover. The background may be filled with a depiction of a medievalist landscape with forests and castles with high turrets, a part of a medieval *mappa mundi* etc. but may also be kept in monochrome colours. The design of the background often sets the mood for the whole cover: A monochrome black cover as in the paperback edition of Susanna *Clarke's Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* evokes different expectations in the potential audience than a medievalist, more or less idyllic landscape inspired by a depiction in a Book of Hours.

9 A well-arranged overview of medieval and early modern fonts is provided by the HAB Wolfenbüttel in cooperation with the Bodleian, Oxford (cf. Wendel 2019, online).

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Books subsumed under the genre of Fantasy may use the same five sources mentioned above yet certain principles of design vary: The fantastical element usually plays a bigger part in the motif so that improbable or unlikely depictions are chosen such as the faun upon a pillar on the cover of Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* or the slightly unnatural and uncanny raven with the blood-red eye on James Brodgen's *The Plague Stones*. It seems that cover designs of Fantasy novels do not shy away from using photographs and altering them according to the demands of the book (cf. Epubli, online) such as on the cover of *The Secret Book of Flora Lea* by Patti Callahan Henry (Bas Bleu publishing house).

Furthermore, the choice of motif depends on more practical reasons such as copyright, licences and costs for the design. Also, the marketing strategy, as already mentioned above, needs to be taken in consideration, which may determine the look of the book but also that of the whole series or even the whole publishing house, especially if it is a smaller publishing house specialised in one genre and with fewer titles. Then the association with a specific design may be useful as recognition value.

With this short glimpse at the rules of cover design it also becomes obvious that the visual representation needs to adhere to notions that are already well-established as medievalist so that the audience can easily identify the genre and potential content of the book. At the same time, the concept of more of the same cannot be used excessively since the cover should also suggest that this book is new, innovative and can thus hold the attention of the potential customer.

6. Functions of the Cover

As already mentioned, the cover of the book is one of the most important element when it comes to marketing strategies. In a bookshop but also with online vendors the cover or images thereof are the point of first contact with potential buyers. Therefore the cover needs to fulfil a range of different functions. In general a cover needs to be designed in such a way that it generates attention already from a long(er) distance. This is usually achieved by the colours used in the design, which are visible even before the motif or the title can be read by a potential customer. Elements recognisable from a distance need first to generate attention to such a degree that the potential customers are induced to come closer to the product in order to see other elements of the cover design. Second, these elements also need to already allow a rough estimation of the genre of the book. If the cover suggests a romantic novel but turns out to be a thriller, customers may feel deceived and disappointed in their expectations and would not engage further with the product. This results in covers of one genre looking vaguely similar and therefore familiar to the audience. Book series also sport a high recognition value through their covers by employing the same colours and overall style, especially with regards to layout, in order to sig-

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nal their belonging into a certain series. Decisions to abandon these well-established characteristics, as discussed above, are not made lightly and usually generate attention from (social) media and customers alike.

Once the primary function of catching the attention of the potential customer is achieved, the cover needs to hold that attention long enough so that the blurb on the back of the book is read or even the first page. In order to do so, details of the cover now come into focus, especially the title and the motif. These should allow for a specific genre estimation and hints at the content of the book. Details of the design are more important at this stage, for example what kind of font is used for the title and name of the author. The style of the cover may link it to already existing books from the same genre or to certain historical periods in which this style was employed. Further details in the motif such as clothing of the characters depicted, time of the day within the landscape etc. ideally are attuned to the content of the book and further set the mood for the story. If the book is set within a series, it might recall important elements from the previous volume in the motif and thus make potential readers remember the story. Lastly, the cover should follow certain aesthetic principles. This does not necessarily mean that the cover has to be pleasant or even beautiful to the observer, but its design should be coherent in itself and harmonious with regards to the content of the book and potentially within the series. Covers of collectors' editions or editions deluxe may be their own works of art and become iconic such as the editions by Allen & Unwin (or Ballantine for the American market) of Tolkien's works.

All in all, the cover of a book, contrary to the saying 'do not judge a book by its cover', is a kind of entry point for potential readers and therefore an important design element within the marketing strategies of publishing houses. Two main principles govern the design of the cover, which are innovation generating customers' attention and conservatism making connections to already established titles on the market. Especially with regard to the last principle, it is important to know what kind of aesthetics, designs and concepts are already ingrained in the public mind as medieval(ist), from which periods they stem and what their view on the medieval period is.

7. Overview of Medievalist Aesthetics

Our contemporary aesthetic image of the medieval period is fuelled mainly by images created from the romantic period onwards. In English, the word medieval first appears at the beginning of the 19th century (cf. Oxford Dictionary 2023, online), but the term Middle Ages, denoting the period between Antiquity and Modernity, is already used in the early 17th century (cf. Oxford Dictionary 2023, online), illustrating that as soon as the awareness of a change of era had sunken in, scholars started

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to think about the past era – first and foremost to point to the differences in order to distinguish their own times and contrast them in a positive way with the dark and dirty Middle Ages. This negative view proved to be rather long-lived and still provides us today with blatantly negative opinions, which I described above as demonisation, of the medieval period. This adverse perspective on the medieval period changed with the romantic movement, encompassing literature and art especially.

7.1 Romantic Period

The *Handbuch Romantik* characterises the focus of Romanticism on the medieval period as »Mittelalterenthusiasmus« (›enthusiasm for the medieval‹ Transl. M.S.) (Schwering 2003: 547) but also warns that this enthusiasm stems from different sources (cf. ibid.) that are not necessarily influenced by an genuine academic or amateur interest in the period as such. Among these are curiosity with regards to a literary epoch which has at that point in time been marginalised, the idea of a form of unity of poetic expressions through the ages, or a critical attitude towards the French Revolution. The romantics turn the medieval period from a dark and barbarous era into a Golden Age, which figures as a predecessor of the romantic period itself. Schlegel even goes so far as to merge the medieval period with his own times (ibid.: 548) and thus stresses its relevance for himself and his contemporaries. Especially in the early romantic period, the focus was particularly on aesthetic principles and the arts of the (late) medieval (cf. ibid.: 549). Later, virtues perceived as (high) medieval such as freedom, mores, honour, chivalry, and, resulting, fame were used within national politics referring to the Napoleonic Wars (ibid.: 551). With regards to Fantasy and its roots in the European arts of the Romantic period, Mendlesohn and James remark upon the huge impact of the

> visionären Künstler […] William Blake, der Maler der Schauerromantik wie Johann Heinrich Füssli […]; und viele Cover lassen sich weniger durch den eigentlichen Bildinhalt zuordnen als vielmehr durch die Schattierungen von Hell und Dunkel und den üppigen Einsatz von Farbe, den die Künstler aus dieser Tradition übernommen haben (Mendlesohn and James 2017: 14).
> visionary artist [….] William Blake, Johann Heinrich Füsli, the painter of Gothic Romanticism, […] and many cover designs can be allocated primarily because of the hues of bright and dark and the sumptuous use of colour (instead of the actual visual content) the artists have adopted from this tradition (Transl. M.S.)

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7.2 Pre-Raphaelites and Arts and Crafts Movement

When characterising the Pre-Raphaelites, Barringer has the following to say:

> Pre-Raphaelitism was characterized by innovative stylistic choices and by insurgent aesthetic, social, political, and religious thinking. Even today, its works – brilliantly colored, shocking in content, transgressive against established canons of good taste – sound a note of dissidence. The movement made its mark through its revolutionary approach to history painting (Barringer 2018: 35).

It brings about a revival of »medieval art forms« in the style of the »Gothic Revival« (ibid.: 37) and extends through Europe (cf. ibid.: 38). Cumming and Kaplan setting out to define the Arts and Crafts Movement sketch it as a counter initiative to »the harshness of late nineteenth-century industrialism« in order to »foster spiritual harmony through the work-process and to change that very process and its products« by the »creation of handmade goods« (Cumming/Kaplan 1991:9). This lead to »a revival of the medieval Gothic« (ibid.: 11), which was not only perceived as the visual symbol of »the order and stability of the Christian faith« (ibid.) but also as a period of artistic freedom and an appreciation of handmade goods, especially art. These are reflected in the works of William Morris »whose ideas exerted the longest and most powerful influence« (ibid.: 14) of all the members of the movement. Motifs for the decoration of Morris' Red House in Kent already hint at source material for much later book covers because they included »flower, tree, animal and bird motifs« as well as »scenes from medieval romances […] with its medieval Gothic spirit and strong colours« (ibid.: 16). Designs by the Kelmscott Press but also the Century Guild are forerunners for later medievalist aesthetics and designs, not only on book jackets but on the various medievalist merchandise mentioned above (cf. the chapter on William Morris by Velten in this volume).

Both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts Movement carry an aesthetic as well as philosophical or even political impetus. L'art pour l'art is something to be rejected – their works are intended to improve the life of the creator as well as that of the buyer. Morris had lifelong problems with conciliating the fact that his expensive designs could only be afforded by wealthy buyers while at heart he was a Socialist.

7.3 From the End of the 19th Century to the End of the 20th Century

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century basically sees a continuation of principles established during Romanticism and the Arts and Crafts movement: Art nouveau and some elements of art déco. Art nouveau with its fondness of floral motifs and organic alignment reproduces important elements of the Arts and Crafts movement while art déco is influenced and expressed by different

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tendencies and especially in its approach towards art (l'art pour l'art) it opens up a chasm to the more philosophical and political approaches which are an integral part of the Arts and Crafts movement. Art déco with its fondness of valuable materials, organic forms, and colourful designs may in parts be traced back to the art nouveau.

In terms of medievalism and medievalist aesthetics the illustrations of Thomas *Malory's Le Morte Darthur* by Aubrey Beardsley (published in 1894)[10] pick up and continue the designs of William Morris and his Kelmscott press (1891–1898). The more elaborate and ornamental style of Morris is already somewhat tuned down in some of Beardsley's zinc-etchings and even more reduced in Marcellino's designs which will considered in extenso in the following.

Probably one of the most formative influences on 20th century medievalism is J.R.R. Tolkien – not only through his vivid writing, detailing landscape and architectural features, clothing and accessories but also through his illustrations which were published from 1979 onwards. Tolkien's formative years were spent around and in Birmingham and his aesthetics are »rooted in the city's manufacturing history« while the »artisan community appealed to him« (Garth 2022: 176). William Morris as one of the central figures of the Arts and Crafts movement was a big influence on Tolkien in

> his writings […], decorative artwork and calligraphy. The associated Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood inspired Tolkien's early ideal of creative community, which he saw as part of his youthful friendship circle the […] T.C.B.S. The Arts and Crafts ethos shaped the ideal of creativity at the heart of his legendarium and also, arguably, his idea of Middle-earth architecture. (ibid.: 177–8).

When following these lines of traditions, it also becomes clear that medievalist aesthetics up to rather recently are concerned with the beautiful and pleasant; this becomes obvious for example when looking at the illustrations of Alan Lee and John Howe which have seeped into the public mind when visualising Tolkien's work. The dark image of the medieval period pervasive in the public mind and sketched above was also depicted but generally, the knight in shining armour on a flawlessly white horse featured more prominently in medievalist depictions than the dirty and diseased peasant.

7.4 Post-Modern

With the screening of the monumental *Lord of the Rings* trilogy at the beginning of the new millennium, medievalist aesthetics within a mainstream context underwent a change that is still very visible more than two decades later. While Romanticism, the

10 I am indebted to Nathanael Busch for pointing this remarkable artist out to me.

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Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts movement as well as much of the late 19th and 20th century reception of medievalist aesthetics have emphasised the beautiful and pleasing, medievalist aesthetics have now turned to a more realistic and gritty approach. The knight errant on his quest, easily identifiable in Aragorn or Frodo from *Lord of the Rings,* does not need to appear in shining armour and voluptuous hair on screen but the actors Mortensen and Wood make it clear that questing is hard business and gets you a dirty face, ragged clothes and greasy hair. Fuqua's *King Arthur* of 2004 has not much in common with the once and future king of earlier generations, while discussions of the phenomenon go beyond the aesthetic aspect with which we are concerned here and

> »deconstructs conventional fantasy tropes, such as good vs. evil morality and nostalgic medievalism, often through emphasizing the brutality of the pseudo-medieval fantasy world and the toll it takes on the people living in such "historical" circumstances« (Bark Persson 2022: 69).

8. Analysis of the Covers of Gillian Bradshaw's Trilogy *Down the Long Wind*

It should now be clear that analysing a cover is a way to not only assign a book to a certain genre but also to a certain time period of publication and reception. It is determined by marketing strategies, contemporary taste and influences and furthermore, it tells us something about the intended target audiences and their knowledge and estimations about the respective genre, content, and attitudes towards the medieval period in general. Therefore the analysis of covers of medievalist novels can highlight how this particular kind of literature, firmly lodged between the genre of historical novel and Fantasy (and potentially more), developed and was received. In order to illustrate how such an analysis might prove fruitful, I have chosen the different cover designs for Gillian Bradshaw's trilogy centring on King Arthur.

8.1 Bradshaw's Writing between the Genres

Bradshaw's writing is particularly interesting for two main points. First of all, the contents of her books illustrate that she had an academic literary training which also included broad readings in medieval literature spanning not only Arthurian tales but also Celtic, more specifically Irish, texts on mythology such as the *Immram Brain maic Febail*. This is quite recognisable especially in her first novel, *Hawk of May*. Second, and closely connected to that point, is the fact that her novels are meandering between the genres of historical novel and Fantasy. Although it is debatable whether the idea of King Arthur had a historical precursor, Bradshaw's novels give

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the strong notion of a historical setting. She does this not so much by juggling dates and historic events but by a realism that permeates her story-telling. It is woven into descriptions of everyday life just as much as into the depiction of an (early) medieval hierarchical society that leads the audience to believe that what she tells could have happened in this way or in a fairly similar manner. With regard to realism, her writing is somewhat similar to Follett's, who also manages to tell us quite plausibly about the development of the entirely fictional settlement of Knightsbridge. Bradshaw, however, includes elements of Fantasy in her tale that have roots in the Celto-Irish mythology and legends: Her main protagonist Gwalchmai is able to leave the 'normal' world behind and enter a realm that fulfils all the criteria displayed above, being strange and fabulous at the same time. It is never altogether clear whether this second, better world only exists in Gwalchmai's imagination and thus makes him a formidable and feared warrior or whether it really exists behind/above/beyond the mortal world to which he has a special access. The same goes for the dark powers that Gwalchmai's mother Morgas exhibits. It is never made absolutely clear if they work because she is in league with supernatural, marvellous and marvellously evil powers or if her sorcery works because it is based on a well-calculated placebo-effect.

This careful balance between the genres make Bradshaw's book covers particularly interesting. They should, according to what was argued before, also carefully balance the design elements and therefore expectations of her audience while also linking her to the tradition within which she is placed.

8.2 Timeline and Context of Bradshaw's Trilogy

When Bradshaw is writing, her fiction is on the one hand nothing new but on the other hand the medievalist hype discussed above had not yet developed to such an extent. Bradshaw's direct forerunners are Rosemary Sutcliff (*Arthurian Trilogy* 1979–1981) and Umberto Eco (*The Name of the Rose*, 1980, English 1983). Bradshaw fits neatly in between with her own trilogy *Down the Long Wind* from 1980 to 1982. Commercially successful successors of Bradshaw are Marion Zimmer Bradley (*The Mists of Avalon* from 1982), Stephen Lawhead *(The Pendragon Cycle* from 1987) or Bernard Cornwell (*The Warlord Chronicles* from 1995), to name just a few.

While Sutcliff, although very successful, offers a retelling of the Arthurian legend, heavily based on Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, for a younger audience and thus has to attune to this specific target group, Bradshaw's novels are written for a slightly older readership but also for adults. Eco's novel, however, founded the fame of its author as the epitome of a literary polyhistor. His historical crime story is a much more ambitious project but it also uses a different setting of a late medieval Italian monastery. So although Eco needs to be considered when thinking about the development of the medievalist hype, his writing differs greatly from Sutcliff's and Bradshaw's but also from later works by authors mentioned above.

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Bradshaw by no means invents the story or founds a genre. Her writing is firmly based in a tradition that reaches back to the end of the 19th century when retellings of the Arthurian legend became popular as novels for boys to infuse them with 'chivalric' virtues such as Sidney Lanier's *The Boy's King Arthur* which was republished in the 1950s. The immensely popular *Once and Future King* by T.H. White, partly made into a Disney movie in 1963, as well as John Cowper Powys *Porius* of 1951, which also blends historical fiction with elements from Celtic mythology, give further context to Bradshaw's writing. Other takes on the Arthurian legend by Susan Cooper (from 1965), Bernard Malamud (1952) or even C.S. Lewis (1945) blending past and present and thus 'modernising' the story can also be deemed as forerunners of Bradshaw although their approach to the content is vastly different. Yet any bibliography of Arthurian retellings makes it very clear that Bradshaw writes at the advent of a medievalist hype that produces more and more adaptions, retellings, translations and other forms of reception of the Arthurian legends in different forms of media.

Important for the analysis of the covers is therefore to keep in mind that Bradshaw, together with others, stand at the beginning of a pop cultural movement. With regard to marketing and sales strategies it is consequently important to find a way to promote the books which allows the potential readership to connect them with something already known (and commercially successful) but also stress their innovative approach to the topic: Bradshaw is not writing for boys to introduce them to medieval virtues like Lanier and others, she is not strictly retelling *Le Mort Darthur* in a version suitable for younger children like Sutcliff, she does not take a comic or optimistic approach to a deeply melancholic and tragic story like White, and she also does not take a decidedly Welsh perspective as Powys does in his take on the Arthurian legend.

8.3 Fred Marcellino (1939–2001)

The cover designs of the three novels *Hawk of May* (1980), *Kingdom of Summer* (1981), and *In Winter's Shadow* (1982) were done by Fred Marcellino[11]. At that time, Marcellino was approaching the hight of his fame as a designer of book jackets. Born in 1939, Marcellino held degrees from Cooper Union and Yale and had a Fulbright scholarship which took him to Venice. He first started his career as an interior designer but from the 1970s onwards he turned towards graphic and illustration, first working on record designs before becoming a renowned illustrator of book jackets. Marcellino's designs are not rooted in a particular style but his approach to the design was rather time-consuming and with a keen eye to detail because he made a point of reading the books he was designing the covers for. This approach was honoured by winning the

11 The following information on Fred Marcellino and his work are taken from (Estate of Fred Marcellino, online).

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National Book Awards, category of jacket design in 1980, 1982, and 1983. The design for Bradshaw's covers falls within these years which highlights that the publishing house, Simon & Schuster, was invested in the project and by commissioning Marcellino as an acclaimed illustrator and designer of covers, also took great care to set up the trilogy for success.

8.4 The Cover Designs by Fred Marcellino

The three different covers adhere to the same principles in terms of design, colour and even motif, which guarantees the value of recognition and the assignment to one specific book series. In terms of structural depiction the impression of the covers is that of linocut, clear alignments and stark contrasts turn the design into a cover that catches the eye of its prospective audience. When looking at all three volumes together, it also becomes apparent that the first design is by far the most playful: the lines are less rigid and more fluid, which makes the overall impression that of a dynamical, less strict composition. The other two designs show a parallel image, evoking strictness, and distance.

The motif of the horseman in canter on the first volume reminds us of the equestrian statuette of Charles the Bald but jambarts, mail shirt and shield attest that the horseman is a warrior and not a ruler – we are looking at the young Gwalchmai, protagonist of the first novel. Both horse and sword play an important role in identifying Gwalchmai throughout the series and become part of his extraordinary personality because he is indeed one of the few characters who has access to the strange and fabulous world of Celtic mythology which lends elements of the Fantasy genre to Bradshaw's trilogy.

In terms of colour, the cover provides a midnight-blue main colour, yellow-golden outlines of the motif and decorative stars in silver. Because of the dark background the motif is even more prominent; arguably choosing dark colours for all the volumes of the series might invoke the idea of the 'Dark Ages', which corresponds not only with the perceived personal living conditions but also with the scarce sources of this period, in which a potential historical Arthur would also fall. All the more prominent is the actual motif on all three covers: The characters seem to literally glow in front of the dark background and thus loom large and glamourous across time. As their attire and accessories are in stark contrast with the impermeable dark background, they also are characters which we automatically feel drawn to. The cover of *Hawk of May* employs gold and silver, which might point to the main protagonist Gwalchmai participating in two worlds, one of the preternatural and one 'realistic' – the waning moon, however, gives already an indication of loss and melancholy. Its position below the horse and its knight suggests that there is the possibility to overcome this. The abundance of stars also adds to the playfulness and positive image of the cover.

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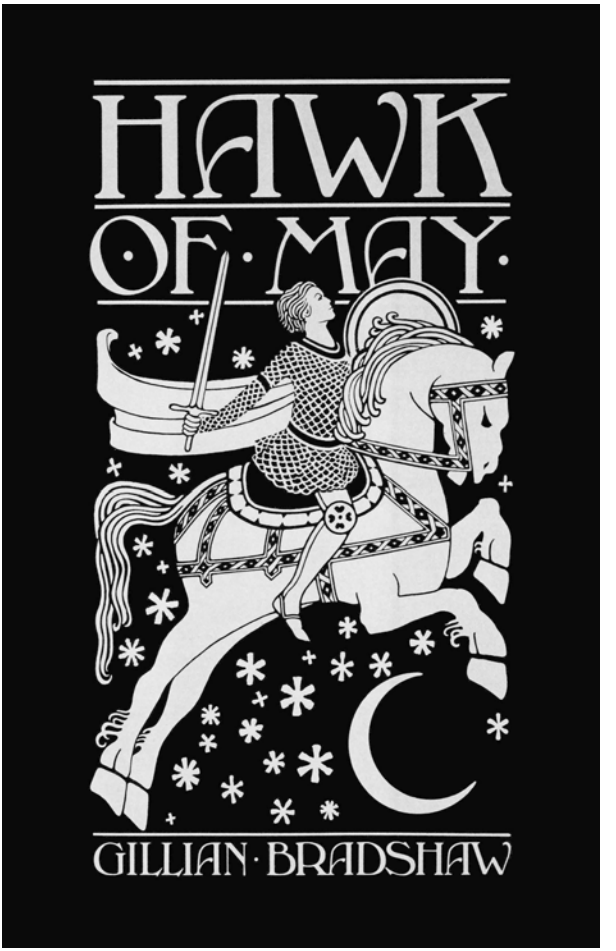
Fig. 1: Hawk of May © Fred Marcellino



The font announcing title and author has similarities of pre- and early Carolingian writing in minuscule but also of the Uncial or half-Uncial; especially the dots between words or within the letter o brings to mind dots that are used to indicate a rhyme or to emphasise spaces between words. These occur particularly in the pre- and early Carolingian minuscule. The most famous example of these two types of palaeographic writings is probably the Beowulf manuscript (Nowell Codex in Cotton MS Vitellius A XV). By using this font throughout the series for the title and the name of the author, the value of recognition as well as the identification with the medieval period are guaranteed. For the latter it is not necessary that the potential readership can identify the font or make connections to the early medieval scribal

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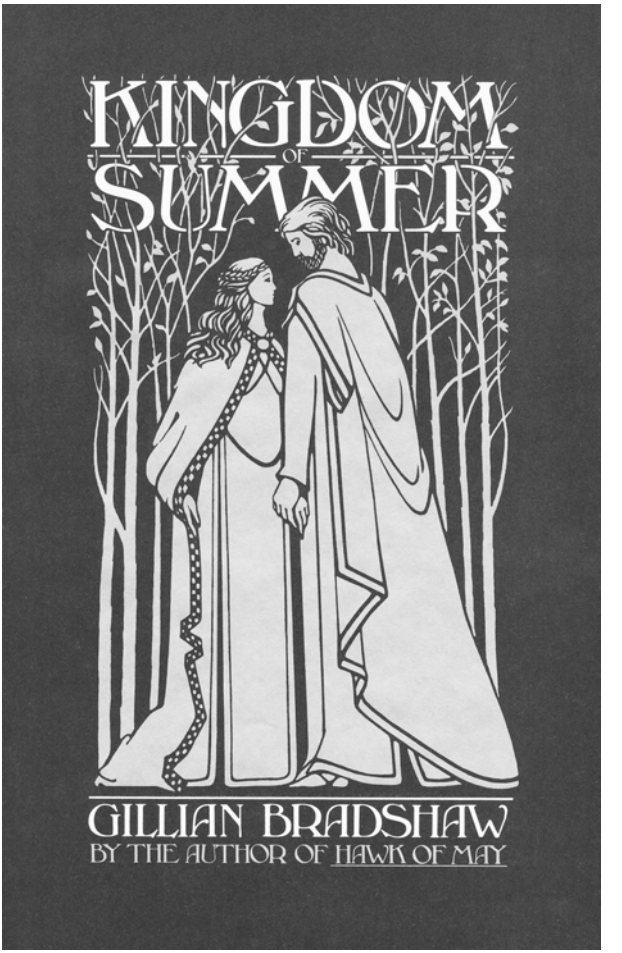
traditions – because of the rather unusual font and the dots in between and within words the identification with the medieval period works.

Fig. 2: Kingdom of Summer © Fred Marcellino



The second volume of the series, *Kingdom of Summer*, sports two central figures on the cover, who might be lovers. The dark green shade of the background and the stylised trees imply a forest setting, which in medieval texts is often an indicator for secrets, adventures and circumstances, characters or events that do not adhere

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to 'civilised' and courtly proceedings[12]. Here the form chosen to depict this forest setting reminds us of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a prominent representative of the Scottish art nouveau, characterised by finesse of lines and ornamental verve (cf. Conti 2000: 59). Within Marcellino's work, a form of stylised forest is also employed for the cover of *A Few Green Leaves* by Barbara Pym, which has been designed in temporal proximity.

The motif of the two persons in close proximity, although not in an overly intimate position may refer to an older Gwalchmai and his lover Elidan holding hands in a rather subtle way. It is not entirely clear if the horseman of the first cover and the male character of the second are the same person but if that is the case, the cover elegantly illustrates the passing of time within the novels: The younger Gwalchmai on the horse carries all the momentum and enthusiasm of youth, his face is beardless and youthful and his posture full of agency. The older Gwalchmai on the second cover not only sports a beard but his whole posture is more thoughtful, less focused on action. Their clothing in long, flowing ornamented cloaks and dress evoke the medieval period while the font and the additional information on the prequel *Hawk of May* make the identification even more clear.

The last volume, *In Winter's Shadow*, depicts a static figure holding a sword on its cover. This is clearly no longer Gwalchmai because the man is wearing a crown, barely visible by his head being tilted backwards. The rich gold colour of his outlines suggest even more than the barely visible crown a regal figure – the colouring of the first volume was much lighter, still suggesting nobility but the contrast between the two shades makes it obvious that here a king is depicted. Readers being familiar with the first two volumes will easily identify this king with Arthur. His posture is dignified but also expresses a deep loneliness and resignation to fate by its static appearance and lifted head which avoids the gaze of the observer. The king also sports a beard indicating not a young and inexperienced man but a king worldly-wised and familiar with the sorrow that comes with power. His grip on the sword is not warlike but a touch that suggests great familiarity with the weapon thus pointing again to his experience with war and bloodshed but, at least in this depiction, his reluctance to make use of the deadly device. Here the association with the medieval period is easily made by the audience by one of the most iconic figures of the period being depicted and easily identified.

12 Cf. Forest and wildness discussed in Strieder, Miriam: Der Wald zwischen höfischer Prachtentfaltung und wildem Raum: Eine Spurensuche in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des Mittelalters. In: Der Deutsche Wald. Kulturgeschichte, Mythologie, Ökologie. In print.

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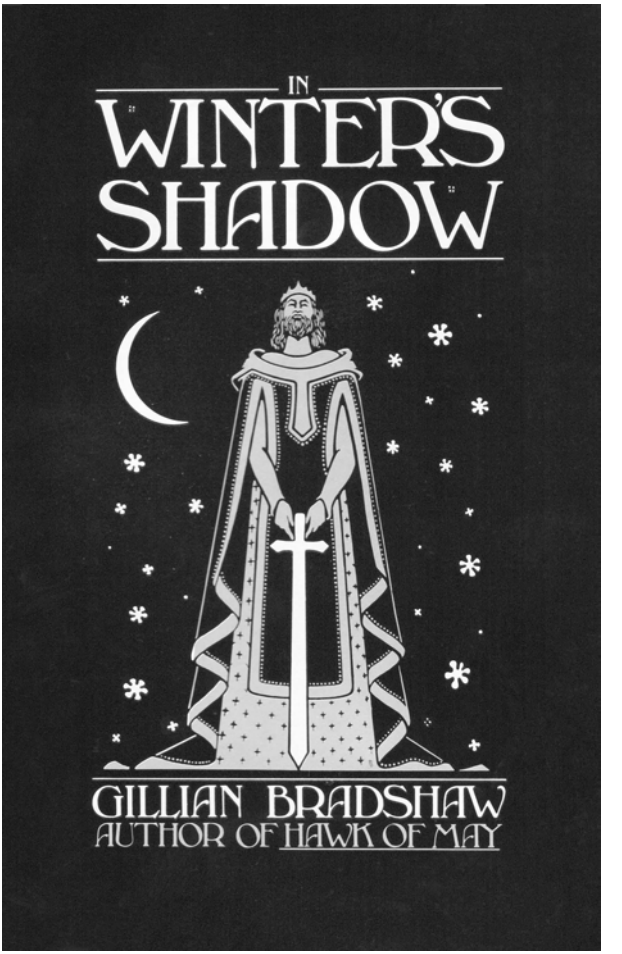
Fig. 3: In Winter's Shadow ©Fred Marcellino



But Marcellino's design goes beyond this easy identification: The sense of tragic loss and melancholy is evoked by the stark symmetry of the solitary figure as well as by the waning moon almost on the same hight as the face of the king. The stars, already familiar through the first cover, reappear but here they do not denote the happy twinkling but emphasise the night that is about to engulf the king. For avid afficionados of Fantasy the stars may be a reminder of Tolkien's depiction of the Door of Durin or the Emblem of Gondor, both also with a dark background bringing out the contrast all the more clearly. Although all three covers designed by Marcellino are held in dark colours, only the last one is truly black thus bringing the colour-coding of the series to its gloomy climax and hinting at the downfall of the Arthurian reign.

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When analysing the design devised by Marcellino it becomes clear how he employs colour-coding, design and general patterns that may already have been familiar so that his book jacket design offers something recognisable with which to root the trilogy within the genres. This is done by connections with the art nouveau as well as by evoking illustrations by Beardsley and then by Tolkien that were first published by his son Christopher in the form of a calendar at the end of the 1970s which means that they could have been familiar to Marcellino.

8.5 The Cover Designs of the German Editions (1982 to 1984)

The German editions use a similar strategy for the design of the cover and therefore for opportunities to market the books. This may not be immediately apparent when looking at the designs because they look very different from Marcellino's. They are inspired by Peter Behrens and Alfons Maria Mucha but there seems to be no contemporary artist that can directly be linked with the designs because at least some of the elements are partly too apposite regarding the content of the series: On the first cover within the central medallion we see the young Gwalchmai throwing a spear or handling a lance, a fighting technique which characterises the protagonist of the first novel. Furthermore, when looking closer, a bird of prey, potentially a hawk, and a horse may be discerned, two animals that are also closely linked with Gwalchmai, who is often called a hawk and who rides a special horse with otherworldly characteristics.

The tendrils enveloping the cover give the cover a special dynamic but may also be linked by the audience to Celtic designs within early medieval book art. The first volume of the series employs the lightest colours by far and thus the generates a positive and optimistic impression. The font for the title and the name of the author is similar to the ones on the covers of the English editions but not so clearly medieval – readability was here the prime focus, especially as the cover as such already seems to be quite full and exuberant with details.

The second cover design poses several problems, first and foremost that the motif can no longer easily be connected with the content of the novel: A lion and a parrot are featured in the pattern of tendrils as well as several male and female figures, none of who can be identified with characters from the story – they are allegorical at best but also for what they actually stand cannot be gauged with certainty. Here, the central medallion offers a face of a woman instead of a sinking or rising sun over the sea. This may be Morgas, Gwalchmai's mother, or Elidan, his lover but a clear identification is impossible. As it is also not clear whether the sun is rising or setting, the mood of the medallion cannot be estimated. All in all, the pattern of tendrils has remained the same, but the colour has grown darker while the background remains light.

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The same observation can be made for the last cover of the series: The colours are even more dark because the background has now been filled with a dark blue colour thus effectively changing the mood of the whole cover. The allegorical figures which are still present seem to be older, especially the royal figure on the right side invokes the impression of mourning and melancholy while other figures also portray this mood by upward to downward glances and facial expressions that convey this impression. Two figures remain puzzling, first the supposedly female figure with the sword in the upper right hand corner – it is possible that this should be read as a depiction of war – and second the female figure with the swan on the lower right hand corner. She might signify Arthur's queen but this needs to remain questionable. The central swan also does not have a direct connection with the plot of the novel; its posture may indicate even the legend of the self-scarifying pelican conveyed by the *Physiologus* but a modern and postmodern general audience would probably not be able to make this connection and a reference to the content of the whole series remains unclear. The stallion on the lower left hand corner may again be a depiction of Gwalchmai's special horse but the connection is not a necessary one. The forest on the right side of the central medallion carries reminiscences of the forests illustrated by Tolkien for the Hobbit (»Bilbo comes to the Huts of the Raftelves« and »The Elvenking's Gate«) but here an eagle-eyed closer look and intimate knowledge of these special illustrations would be necessary to identify it. Lastly the crown in the central medallion offers interesting perspectives: It is not seen as a whole but leaves parts invisible thus denying the perfection of a round object. Furthermore, it is not symmetrical but quite unconventional with its centre piece off centre in the medallion. It thus indicates a troubled kingship which rings true for the last part of the series. The association is, however, yet again so vague that a broader audience would probably only be able to connect the crown with kingship as such.

It seems that the elegance evoked by the references to art nouveau gets more and more subtle with each design and a strangely unfitting naivety creeps into the designs. This may be a reference to the decay and final downfall of the Arthurian reign as depicted in Bradshaw's telling of the Arthurian legend but it may also be grounded in reasons that can no longer be identified.

The difference to Marcellino's design with the clear alignment, stark contrasts and easily decoded symbolism is striking. Although both designs refer to already established and well-known tendencies in the arts and easily identifiable precursors, the differences are prominent and should have evoked different estimations of the series by the potential audience and their expectations regarding the novels.

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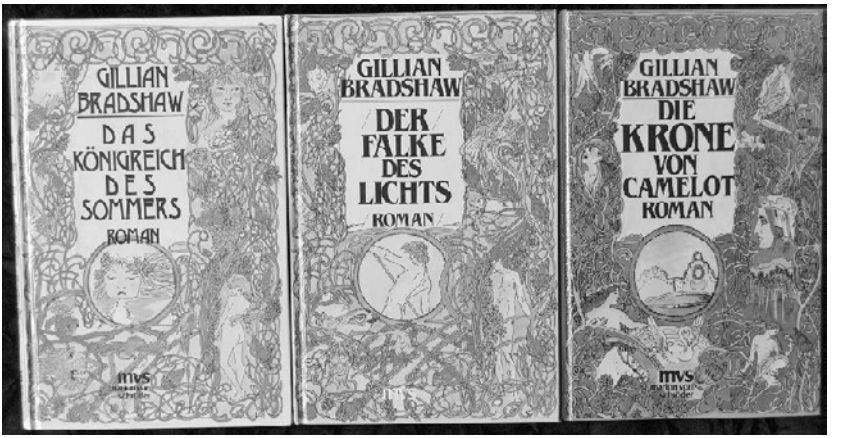
Fig. 4: The Three Covers of the German Edition © photography Rainer Schiefer



8.6 The Design of the German Collected Volume of 1999

A collected volume in German was published in 1999 by the publishing house Schröder and the cover design uses yet another approach to denote a medievalist content. This denotation is fabricated by the use of the painting *Parzival und der Gral* by Eduard Ille (1869). Ironically, neither this knight nor the Grail play any part in Bradshaw's novels. The central medallion and the right side of the cover are so generic that they may also be connected with elements of the narrative: The medallion depicts knight and lady in the context of courtly love which may be attributed to Gwalchmai and Elidan or the queen and Bedwyr but neither couple strictly adheres to a setting of courtly love. The right part of the cover shows a knight on a horse, in its original context probably Parzival on his quest for the Grail, but readers of the novels may easily identify the knight with Gwalchmai on his white stallion although the horse depicted is probably not completely white. The left hand scene, however, needs to remain mysterious for a readership of the novels: Obviously we are looking at the Grail being presented by his carrier at the castle of the Grail – in Bradshaw's trilogy, there is no scene that is comparable which would allow for a clear association.

The main colour of the cover is a warm tinge of orange, neither associations with the regal red nor with gold can be easily made, although the warm hue offers the association with gold more easily than with the powerful red. The colour is strikingly different from the dark images of Marcellino and the colour code growing more shadowy and dark of the German editions from the 1980s. Again, when considering the content of the trilogy, the colour does not necessarily fit the story – expectations of a warm and positive tale are evoked, not one of tragic loss and a bygone era. The

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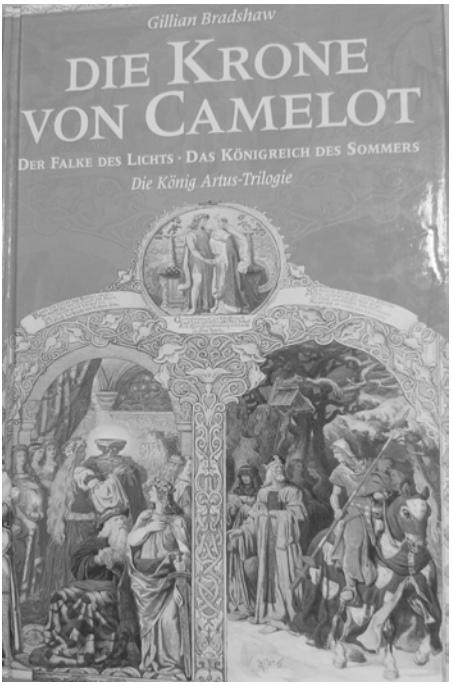
font for the title and the name of the author does not use any elements that would make an identification of medievalist content possible, which means that this identification rest solely with the motif.

Fig. 5: Die Krone von Camelot ©Werbeagentur Eisele & Bulach, Augsburg



Ille's style can be easily identified with the Nazarenes, originally a group of German artists, mostly from the South and Catholic, residing during the romantic period in Rome. Ille's works, however, are too late for this attribution. He addresses the upper class of Munich and the Bavarian nobility of the mid 19th century and provides them with paintings on medieval, bygone glory but also contributions to the *Münchner Bilderbogen*. His image of the Middle Ages is far removed from what Bradshaw generates in her novels – the mismatch of cover design and content can be explained by taking into consideration that the collected volume was published in 1999, almost twenty years after the original publication date: Medievalist content has become well known and popular within the mainstream culture, it has its own fanbase and therefore a cover design does not need to employ sophisticated means to facilitate sales. A generic association with the medieval period, a knight errant and an otherworldly

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or preternatural mystery suffice for the audience to identify medievalist content. Furthermore, the catchwords »Krone« and »Camelot«, prominently placed in the title, make the identification of genre and content as easy as possible – Marcellino's specific hints, elegantly designed, have become superfluous.

Two years later the first part of the *Lord of the Rings* movies was screened and introduce a new form of medievalist aesthetics based on Tolkien's own designs but also on elements from films from the 1980s and 1990s. The exorbitant success of the movies, the immense merchandising and their continuation (most recently by Amazon Prime) have elevated these aesthetics to a kind of gold standard when it comes to medievalist content, which means that the covers designed by Marcellino are still considered 'fashionable' while especially the design of the collected volume feels even more alien today.

8.7 Other German Editions

In 1984 and in 1991, Rowohlt and Goldman published paperback editions of Bradshaw's novels. The designs of the covers look very different from what we have examined so far. The design is much more easily linked with the content of the books and it does not refer to medievalist currents in the arts. Both designs change the attribution of the cover in favour of children's or young adults fiction by employing colourful and clear depictions of medievalist topics. With the edition from Rowohlt, Gwalchmai is in the centre of the depiction while the background of the edition done by Goldman may hint at an illustration in a Book of Hours. Both covers use the fact that Bradshaw's trilogy was commercially successful, that further novels with medievalist content as well as movies like *Excalibur* (1981), *Ladyhawke* (1985) or *The Name of the Rose* (1986) have provided new medievalist aesthetics which were not heavily influenced by currents in the arts.

Only one year after the publication of the collected volume, Bradshaw's trilogy is again published, this time by Econ and again it has been branded as children's and young adults' literature. This becomes very apparent when looking at the cover, where a boy, serving as identification for the young readership, stretches a hand out admiringly to reach Gwalchmai's horse. In 2008 the trilogy was last published for a German market: The Aufbau publishing house worked with elements described above by using the aesthetics of faded parchment, a clearly identifiable symbol that denotes medievalist content and a familiar decorative background which vaguely evokes insular or Nordic designs – the medievalist hype is at that time so prominent that allusions with sword, ornaments and parchment suffice to be able to identify the content of the book and thus reach the respective target group.

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9. A Conclusion on Medievalist Aesthetics and Marketing

Today's perspective is vastly different from when Bradshaw was writing: Medievalist aesthetics have become a mainstream design element for all kinds of media and merchandise alike. Novels, movies, and computer games have greatly influenced our perception of medievalist content – probably the most influential elements have been adaptations of Tolkien's novels and the *Game of Thrones series*, both in written and visual form. When thinking about today's medievalist aesthetics, it makes sense to conclude with Marco Schneiders again: The new aesthetics of Bastei Lübbe as well as Macmillan for the English edition with its stark colour and simple motif remind of Marcellino's work. The helmet of Sutton Hoo depicted on the cover of both editions is one of the most iconic sights of medievalist aesthetics while the background is filled with ornaments – for the English cover these remind us of the designs made popular by the Book of Kells and similar manuscripts in the insular style while the German edition features architectural elements which refer back to the building of the cathedral in the first book of the *Knightsbridge-series*.

These elements, helmet, insular ornaments, and architectural features, illustrate fittingly how in an almost unperceivable way, knowledge about the medieval period has seeped into the mind of the broader public but also how new, and partly more sophisticated, points of reference have been established, how elements, artists and oeuvres have become canonical.

In conclusion on the analysis of the different designs for book covers of one and the same text, one might reach the following verdict: Marcellino takes up the aesthetics by Tolkien and thus puts Bradshaw's writing into a certain line of tradition; her tale is nothing genuinely new but a retelling of something familiar. This is what the cover gets across especially for an audience that is already acquainted with medievalist writings. At the beginning of the 1980s neither Marcellino nor marketing experts can fully fathom that they are on the brink of a medievalist hype that will last through the next decades and will also affect other forms of media such as film and, even more prominently, computer games. At that point, Bradshaw's potential readership is limited and experiments with regards to medievalist aesthetics are not considered wise. The quite remarkable cover designs of Marcellino show that the medieval period and its reception has not yet reached the mainstream; since then much has changed and with it the medievalist aesthetics and marketing strategies.

A similar conclusion may be drawn for the German editions: It also draws on an aesthetic tradition, namely that of art nouveau – Tolkien and his particular aesthetic are not that well known and popular in the German speaking world at that time and therefore do not exhibit such a high recognition value. Therefore, the creator of Middle Earth is not necessarily a point of reference for the design of the editions of the early 1980s. After the first attempts of linking Bradshaw's novels with the art nou-

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veau, publishing houses change their strategy and instead rebrand the trilogy and locate it within the genre of children's and young adults' fiction.

For a scholarly engagement with medievalist aesthetics and cover design in particular, this leads to two overall conclusions: First, do judge a book by its cover and do take the implications of that cover into consideration! Second, cover design and marketing strategies tell us something important about the public that had been characterised at the beginning of this paper: Knowledge about the medieval period, even if it is based on fictional instead of factual or even academic sources, has grown exponentially over the last decades. Forty years ago, almost no one could have identified the helmet from Sutton Hoo and connected it with the early medieval period – designs by Tolkien were already too specific for a broader readership outside the anglophone world. The cover designs discussed here prove to be a good indicator not only for the extent of the medievalist hype but also for the knowledge about the period it has disseminated within a broad readership.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: ›Cover for Hawk of May‹, designed by Fred Marcellino, 1980. In: Gilian Bradshaw: Hawk of May. New York 1980, Simon & Schuster.

Fig. 2: ›Cover for Kingdom of Summer‹, designed by Fred Marcellino, 1981. In: Gilian Bradshaw: Kingdom of Summer. New York 1981, Simon & Schuster.

Fig. 3: ›Cover for In Winter's Shadow‹, designed by Fred Marcellino, 1982. In: Gilian Bradshaw: In Winter's Shadow. New York 1983, Simon & Schuster.

Fig. 4: ›Cover designs for the German edition‹, photography by Rainer Schiefer, without date.

Fig. 5: ›Cover design for the German compiled edition, based on the painting *Parzival und der Gral* by Eduard Ille (1869)‹, designed by Werbeagentur Eisele & Bulach, Augsburg.

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William Morris's Medievalist Visual Aesthetics and its Persistence in Fantasy

Hans Rudolf Velten

»The way in which Morris lived his life and created his works is his medievalism.«
(Elisabeth C. Küster)

1. William Morris: Works

London-born William Morris (1834–1896) was a politically active man of many artistic talents, a true *uomo universale* of the 19th century. He had such a comprehensive interest in aesthetic and social concepts and expressions that he had no difficulty in juggling such diverse tasks as starting a company to design patterned wallpapers, running a printing press, designing furnishings and books, writing Fantasy novels, and giving lectures on decorative book designs in the incunabula period – combining an almost reactionary fascination with the Middle Ages with a Utopian ideal of socialism. He was one of the founders of, and a long-time central figure in the *Arts and Crafts* movement, which was devoted to the art of the Middle Ages and was an anti-industrial and historicist group. Because of this, he was already highly familiar with the protagonists among Pre-Raphaelite artists such as Dante Gabriel Rosetti and Edward Burne-Jones, with whom he completed numerous book projects. Finally, he was a devotee and enthusiast for the ideas of Karl Marx, with whose daughter Eleanor he founded the *Socialist League* in 1885. Furthermore, he is also considered an early proponent of sustainability and ecological consciousness.[1]

At present, he remains still little known in Germany and in Europe outside of the British Isles, although he was certainly one of the most vibrant personalities of the English Victorian era at the end of the 19th century. There are, of course, many reasons to deal with this figure – to begin this article, then, I must clearly justify why I have chosen to do so. Namely, Morris has been called the inventor of the Fantasy

1 Bibliographical information from MacCarthy 1994: 1–24.

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novel in early Fantasy research (cf. Matthews 1997: 3). I believe this characterization goes too far. After all, in the dominant view the modern genre of the Epic Fantasy (not Fantasy literature itself) arose with J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, who established the genre in the mid-20th century. However, Morris did influence Tolkien in many different ways, so that he and his novels and book art can be seen as predecessors for Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, who took inspiration and examples from his works (I will address this in more detail later on). However, apart from these philological influences, I also see Morris as the central personality of Victorian art, which shaped multiple medieval visual and design patterns as well as a typical visual style, influencing not only Tolkien and Lewis, but also the entire pictorial aesthetic of Fantasy as a genre. This is the thesis of this paper.

Like Tolkien, Morris began as a translator before he started to write his own novels: he first translated Virgil's Aeneis (*The Aeneids of Vergil*, 1875–1876) from the Latin, then Homer's Odyssee (*The Odyssey of Homer*, 1887–1888) from Greek, later turning to medieval epics ranging from ancient French novels (*Old French Romances*, 1896) to Beowulf, for which he completed an alliterative translation, impressing his contemporaries (Jones 2010: 364). Due to such projects, he became a kind of multiplier for ancient English culture, advocating for the (re-)discovery of England's own epic and mythical traditions. He explored the Eddic tradition in collaboration with Icelandic academic Eiríkr Magnússon, helping to increase its availability and popularity in England. He worked with Magnússon to translate the Völsunga Saga (*The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs, with certain songs from the Elder Edda*, 1870), before putting forward a comprehensive new version in hexameter: *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and und The Fall of the Niblungs* (1876).

Morris became famous for a more comprehensive poetic work, which was published in four volumes under the title *The Earthly Paradise* between 1868 and 1870 and based on the structure of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Classical and Northern Irish mythological stories are arranged in alternating order in the annual cycle. This successful four-volume collection led to two nominations for the prestigious post of 'Professor of Poetry' at Oxford in 1877 on the one hand and the succession to Alfred Tennyson as poet laureate on the other. However, Morris declined both of these appointments (MacCarthy 1994: 374–375).

After writing the *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris completed a series of historical novels: in 1888 *A Tale of The House of Wolfings*, a fictitious tale in prose and verse from the end of the Iron Age which attempts to describe the life of the Germanic-speaking Goths. Then, in rapid sequence, he published *The Roots of the Mountains* (1889), *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1890), *The Well at the World's End* (1892), *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894), *Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair* (1895) as well as *The Water of the Wondrous Islands* (1897), which features his first female protagonist, Birdalone.

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Fig. 1: Opening page of The Story of the Glittering Plain or the Land of the Living. Illustration: W. Crane (Kelmscott Press 1890)

Fig. 2: Opening page of The Wood beyond the World. Illustration E. Burne-Jones (Kelmscott Press, 1894)

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Some of these novels are *quest romances*, and follow the Arthurian convention of an adventurous quest. Their protagonists are drawn from the period of Germanic antiquity up to the colonization of England by the Anglo-Saxons, the Danes and the Normans.

William Morris's interest in past times and spaces with a long medieval period at the center runs through almost all of his artistic activities[2]. It began with the painting of the *Hall* at Exeter College in Oxford with scenes from the Arthurian world alongside Burne-Jones and Rosetti, which disappeared again shortly after the project was completed because they were applied improperly to the plaster (Wood 1973: 143). In 1861, together with several other Pre-Raphaelites, he founded a decorative arts company providing interior design for Victorian homes. This was highly successful and had a long-lasting influence on contemporary tastes (later *Morris & Co.*). Among other things, it produced large, hand-knotted carpets using medieval production methods, furnishings, glass windows, and, above all, wall decorations and wallpaper[3].

Fig. 3: W. Morris & E. Burne-Jones: Verdure with Deer and Shields IV (1900)

2 Elisabeth C. Küster recognized William Morris's medievalism very early in (1928: 6–24).

3 Today, William Morris is known primarily through his work as an interior designer, textile and wall designer. There are, likewise, many published works regarding this work; I will name just a few of these: Pevsner, Nikolaus: Pioneers of modern design: from William Morris to Walter Gropius, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1960; Harvey, Charles: William Morris. Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain. Manchester: MUP 1991; Waggoner, Diane: The Beauty of Life. William Morris & the Art of Design. London: Thames & Hudson 2003; Parry, Linda: William Morris textiles. London: V&A 2013; Mason, Anna (Ed.): William Morris. London: Thames & Hudson 2021.

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Morris based all of these artisanal products to a large extent on medieval ornamental patterns, primarily drawn from handwritten manuscripts and early printed works. For Morris, these handmade artifacts produced according to medieval templates were »popular art« or »lesser art«, a type of craftsmanship intended to give pleasure to both manufacturers and purchasers through its beauty, both during production and in everyday use. In his 1877 lecture *The lesser arts*, Morris proposed a working aesthetic for everyone involved in designing public and private spaces:

> I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few. (…) That art will make our streets as beautiful as the woods, as elevating as the mountain-sides: it will be a pleasure and a rest, and not a weight upon the spirits to come from the open country into a town (…) and every man will have his share of the best. (Thompson 1991: 173)

According to Morris, Arts and Crafts should be made by hand using medieval techniques, rather than being fabricated as an industrial mass product – while remaining affordable for all. In line with the medieval awareness of form and material, he strove for a combination of beauty and usefulness. The artisan should take pleasure in the beauty of his products and produce objects of value for all through collaborative work with (rather than as a result of division of labor or calculation of purpose).[4] Morris attempted to meet this ideal of free, sustainable work in his architecture, furniture design, and decorative work. He implemented it in his own *Red House*, which he built and lived in from 1859 to 1865.

At the center of Morris' medieval work aesthetic, however, was book art. In 1891, he set up his own print shop in Hammersmith in order to reinvent the techniques and typography of the incunabula era for the industrial age. By 1898, his own publishing house, Kelmscott Press, had published 54 books, including the famous 15th century edition of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, illustrated by Edward Burne-Jones, as well as 17 of his own works. In this way, Morris realized a close connubium of author, artist and printer, as was the case in the early printed editions, especially with regard to the very close relationship between text and image. The medieval illuminated manuscripts already aimed to combine text and image in their page design, as can be seen in the new order and aesthetics of the book page in the 12th century described by Ivan Illich (Illich 1993: 97–114).

4 Paul Thompson called this a »romantic« viewpoint (from an ideological-critical perspective, you could also say it is a Marxist viewpoint, if one underscores the insight into the alienation of collaborative processes). Cf. Thompson 1991: 172.

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Fig. 4: Opening page of Eusebius: De Evangelica Praeparatione (Venetiae: Nicolas Jenson 1470).

This manuscript book art, which still imitated the incunabula prints, was the model for the book design of the Kelmscott Press: Morris not only coordinated texts and images, but rather aestheticized the entire book as a material object, including its fonts, decorative initials, print space, vignettes, margins and (marginal) decorations. His work was a historical quotation of medieval book art on the one hand, as well as a model for innovative and pioneering book art on the other (cf. Schmitz-Emans 2019: 18–23, here 18).[5] In numerous lectures on medieval and early modern book art, Morris developed a comprehensive and transformative aesthetic – but he warned against imitating the art of the Middle Ages: »But that time had clean passed

5 Regarding Morris's book art and reception, see also Thompson 1996 as well as the important article by Elizabeth Helsinger (2020: 261–277).

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away, and however real the continuity of history, they must recognise the enormous gulf between that period and the present.« Instead, artists should attempt to make things just as well as in the Middle Ages »(…) and by that time they could do this and make things as well as the Middle Ages they would begin to know what the capabilities of art were« (Morris 1982: 22–23). Morris was therefore not interested in imitation, but in productive adaptation and transformation. Above all, he admired the southern German printers (from Ulm and Augsburg) and the Venetian printer Nicolas Jenson, whose page design and decoration he used.

In their work, he recognized the connection between epic and ornamentation in the relationship between text and illustration:

> An illustrated book, where the illustrations are more than mere illustrations of the printed text, should be a harmonious work of art. The type, the spacing of the type, the position of the pages of print on the paper, should be considered from the artistic point of view. The illustrations should not have a mere accidental connection with the other ornament and the type, but an essential and artistic connection. They should be designed as a part of the whole, so that they would seem obviously imperfect without their surroundings. (Morris 1982: 40)[6]

The most important goal for Morris was to »create beautiful books«, the prerequisite for this being the harmonious interaction of all the book's components.[7] Moreover, according to art historian Elizabeth Helsinger, Morris's books gave birth to a fundamental ornamental aesthetic »for all« to be perceived with the senses as well as with the intellect. Jonathan Hay defines ornament as »rhythmic affirmation of motifs across a surface in tension with a limit« (Hay 2019: 2). Helsinger recognizes a close relationship between the textual semantics, its appearance in the book, and its other ornamental and material components, i.e. a connubium of semantics and material, metrics and design (»arranged in complex of multiple metrical an stanzaic shapes and punctuated with striking verbal patterns in color and sound«) which was highly important for the specific ornamental aesthetic of Morris's book design (Helsinger 2021: 263).

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6 Later on, Morris adds: »I lay it down as a general principle in all the arts, where one artist's design is carried out by another in a different material, that doing the work twice over is by all means to be avoided as the source of dead mechanical work« (39).

7 Morris calls Jenson and other printers his role models: »If you will examine carefully the formation of the letters in this book and compare them with what I have called my 'Golden Type,' you will see that it is on Jenson that I have drawn for inspiration.« (…) »But what I want to point out is that the beauty of the form is with such printers as Jenson, Pannartz, Koberger, and others, almost perfectly realised. My own types differ from theirs hardly in essentials« (from the interview of the *Bookseller* (1895) with William Morris, in: Morris 1982: 108–109; cf. also McGann 1993: 49: »Morris's books call out attention to poetry as a materially-orientated act of imagination. «

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She bases this view in part on Morris's own statements, which were published in response to the following question in an interview in the *Bookseller* in 1895: »What guides you in the ornamentation of your pages?« he answered: »The subject, of course. In my *Froissart*, for instance, on which I am now very busy, I have made special designs, floriated ones, but having the coats of arms of all the nobles mentioned in the History.« (Morris 1982: 110). In rediscovering the working methods and the awareness for form and material of printers from the incunabula period, Morris develops a modern book aesthetic that recognizes text and image, semantics and decoration as a unified whole. In doing so, he aims not only at the beauty of the book, but also at the imagination and reception of its texts by the book reader.

2. Tolkien and Morris

It is nothing new that Morris was a model for Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, that they knew and appreciated his novels. Lewis, for instance, praised the simple style of his novels, which beautifully contrasted the decorative images and elements of the books (cf. Goodwin 1991: 62). In addition to their professional interest in mythological and folklore tales of the Middle Ages, Tolkien and Lewis were also interested in medieval texts and images offered to them by Victorian culture from a young age (cf. Scoville 2005: 93–104).[8] Scholarly research has already adequately proven that Morris's texts influenced the two founders of modern Fantasy literature due to numerous motifs, landscape and character disposition. Many parallels have been drawn between Morris's novels and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* with respect to characterization, plot motifs, archaic diction, syntax and semantics, as well as to topographic descriptions and resurrection.[9] Therefore, in the following I will concentrate rather on the re-

8 Also see Biemer 2012: 51–62.

9 A complete exploration is found in Kelvin Lee Massey's dissertation (2007): The Roots of Middle Earth. William Morris's Influence upon J. R. R. Tolkien, specifically on *The Lord of the Rings*. KellyAnn Fitzpatrick identifies how Morris's other novels also had a significant influence on Tolkien; he takes several names from The House of the Wolfings (*Mirkwood* as the name for forests in different texts, *the Mark* as a term for Rohan, *Dale* as the ruined city near Laketown in *The Hobbit* etc. (27–38). Tolkien's elves have a lot in common with the immortals from *The Glittering Plain*, as Fitzpatrick notes: »Tolkien's association of elves with immortality, with a set of magical islands set away from the mainland, and with an ethereal beauty often described through imagery such as evening and stars are arguably directly inspired by Morris« (71). Fitzpatrick also sees similarities in their writing styles: »Even Morris's writing style in his romances – archaic-style prose interspersed with poetry – is recalled in Tolkien's fiction, where elves and hobbits alike are known to break into song. « (70). Finally, many scholars have noted that Tolkien's model of the »secondary world« was likely based on Morris's ability to combine *medieval romance* and *Utopian fiction* in his novels.

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ception of Morris's medievalism, his illustrations, and his ornamental aesthetics by Tolkien.

As for Tolkien, he is documented as an early reader of Morris' works. As he states in *On Fairie Stories*, as a child he read about »the nameless North of Sigurd of the Völsungs, and the prince of all dragons,« referring to William Morris's translation of the Völsunga Saga (Scull/Hammond 2006: 601).[10] In 1914, he used part of his prize money for the Skeat prize for English (named after philologist Walter Skeat) to buy three of Morris's books: *The Life and Death of Jason*, Morris's translation of the *Völsunga Saga* and his novel *The House of the Wolfings*. Hammond and Scull show that Tolkien's *The Story of Kullervo*, which he started in 1914, was inspired by his reading of Morris's novels, and that he received a copy of Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* as a gift from H.T. Wade-Gery in 1916.

In 1914, in a letter to his fiancée and later wife Edith, he wrote that he wanted to turn one of the stories from the Kalevala into a short story, »somewhat on the lines of Morris's romances with chunks of poetry in between« (Tolkien 1981: 439f).[11] This letter shows that the characteristic blend of prose and stanzaic poetry Morris used in his novels had made a lasting impression on Tolkien. In a letter to Lewis in 1943, he emphasized that Morris's prose works should be defended more vigorously. He himself had begun to lecture on William Morris's *The Story of Sigurd and the Fall of the Niblungs* at Pembroke College at the time. A personal connection to Morris's family arose when Sigridur Thorarinsson, an Icelandic au-pair, came to stay with the Tolkiens and practiced Old Norse with him between 1926 and 1930. She was introduced to the Tolkiens by May Morris, William Morris's daughter, because she was the cousin of Eirikr Magnusson, with whom Morris had translated the Edda and Icelandic sagas.

Over the last two decades in particular, research has highlighted the numerous links between William Morris's novels and Tolkien's works: from »nordic elements« to structural similarities in the 'hero's journey' and »geographic descriptions« – important components for »secondary creation« – along with topics and motifs (magical objects, the role of trees, elves as immortal, ephemeral beings, »huns« and »orks«) to literal borrowings (Silverfax and Shadowfax, Gandolf and Gandalf), to name just a few.[12] In the words of James McNelis:

10 Cf. also Evans 1998: 175–191.

11 There is a similar quote in a letter from Tolkien to L.W. Forster from the late 1960s: The plot and development of the *The Lord of the Rings* »owe more to William Morris and his Huns and Romans, as in The House of the Wolfings and The Roots of the Mountains.« (440).

12 Cf. Burns 2005: 367–73: »Morris's influence on Tolkien can be seen in the emphasis both men give to the mythology and social structure of an idealized North, a world which emphasizes independence, directness, and simple artistic form« (367). Cf. also Perry 2007: 439–44; as well as Scoville 2005: 94.

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> Morris was by far the most influential of the Pre-Raphaelites for Tolkien. C.S. Lewis's own fondness of Tolkien's writing came about in part because it reminded him of Morris's. Tolkien explicitly acknowledged the influence of Wolfings and of the Mountains as sources for the Dead Marshes and the Morannon. (McNelis 2006: 35–36)[13]

Let us now turn to the illustrative and ornamental elements that interested Tolkien in Morris's works. Here it should first be noted that the relevance of the three Victorian artistic movements of Arts & Crafts, *Art nouveau* and the Pre-Raphaelites as influencing factors for Tolkien and Lewis is obvious, as »they pervaded the British culture of Tolkien's youth and have endured ever since« (McNelis 2006: 36). With regard to the influence of William Morris, McNelis summarizes:

> Morris's influence in terms of book art, while less documented, may have been equally great. (…) While Tolkien's calligraphy derives largely from medieval influences, from runic inscriptions to uncial Irish early medieval lettering and the clear fluid lines of ninth-century Carolingian minuscule, Morris is a likely inspiration there as well (…) (McNelis 2006: 36).[14]

John Garth puts it even more directly: »Perhaps the most abiding and productive artistic influence on Tolkien was William Morris. Tolkien's absorption of similar ideals is apparent in his frieze patterns and decorative picture-borders, his Númenórean tiles and Elven heraldic devices, and particularly his book-jacket designs« (Garth 2006: 36 et seq.).

A further aspect concerns Tolkien's appreciation for medieval calligraphic ornamentation, as is evident in the artistic design of Elvish scripts. For Tolkien, the shape of the script was just as important as phonemic considerations in Elvish languages

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13 With reference to Podles 2002: 41–47. Cf. also Fitzpatrick 2019: 69: »In addition to the distinct linguistic elements that Tolkien borrows from Morris's historical fiction (Mirkwood for the name of a forest in numerous texts; the mark as a term for Rohan in *The Lord of the Rings*; (both from *The House of the Wolfings*); Dale as a ruined city near Laketown in *The Hobbit*), Tolkien also follows Morris in that he appropriates the culture and language of a historical group of people in his fiction«; Biemer (2012) even sees specific motifs: the ring of Barahir in the *Silmarillion*, she assumes, was influenced by the snake-shaped magic ring that Birdalone receives from Habundia in *The Water of the Wondrous Isles*; the dwarf in *The Wood Beyond the World* shares some features with Gollum (rough voice, exorbitant, animalistic physical behavior); finally, the dry tree in *The Well at the World's End*, recalls the withered white tree of Gondor (53–57).

14 Cf. also the latest investigation in Tankard 2019: 35, which establishes Morris's influence on Tolkien's visual aesthetic, in particular his calligraphy.

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(Holmes 2006, 29). His publisher Unwin explained Tolkien's inclination and talent for design with his professional interest in medieval manuscripts.[15]

Fig. 5: J.R.R. Tolkien: Númenórean Tile from Elenna preserved in Gondor (1960) (McIlwaine 2018: 17)
Fig. 6: J.R.R. Tolkien: Floral Designs and Borders; Númenórean Ceramic Grass Patterns; Border Designs (1960) (McIlwaine 2018: 191)

Addressing his interest in artisanal production, in the spirit of William Morris, Hammond and Scull underscored, in their book *Tolkien. Artist and Illustrator*:

> It seems clear, too, that he (Tolkien) agreed with the underlying philosophy of Morris and his followers, which looked back to a much earlier time: that the 'lesser' arts of handicraft embodied truth and beauty no less than the 'fine' arts of painting and sculpture. One looks for the latter almost in vain in his writings (…), but finds a wealth of references to crafts. The carved pillars, floor of many hues, and 'woven cloth' of Théoden's Hall in The Lord of the Rings spring to mind. (Hammond/Scull 1995: 9–10)

We can see that Morris's influence on Tolkien's visual design of illustrations, ornamentation and manuscripts, both in his texts and in his artistic work – whether published or not – was at least as great as that on his storytelling and narrative style.

15 Cf. Holmes 2006: 32: »Stylized curlicues of arboreal tendrils such as we see in Tolkien's *Amalion* designs, abound in medieval manuscripts. In fact, the preferred border design for medieval illuminators appeared to be, in most cases, the very sort of branches and leaves and nesting birds we find in Tolkien's *Tree of Amalion*.«

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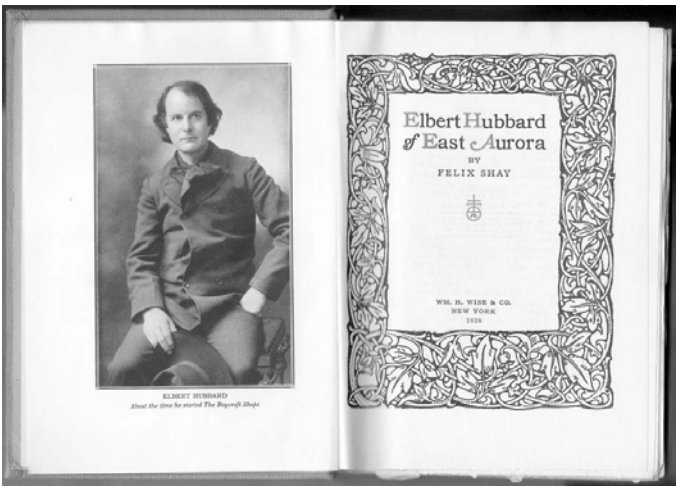
Knowledge of and love for medieval languages, literature and book art as well as their modern adaptation unites both as authors and artists. It should be emphasized that medievalism was neither politically nor aesthetically backward-looking in Morris's nor Tolkien's case, but highly modern (Chance/Sievers 2005: 3). This is the prerequisite for its enduring impact in text and image to this day.

3. Morris and Fantasy

Fig. 7: Opening page of Felix Shay: Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora (1926)



In the following, I intend to outline the impact William Morris's visual style had on Fantasy literature beyond Tolkien and Lewis. I see certain pictorial patterns that are imprinted on Fantasy as a genre through the adoption of Victorian medieval visual aesthetics. These patterns are by no means the only determining factor for cover design, illustrations and book decoration in Fantasy; there is far more than just one iconographic direction here. But the Victorian visual aesthetics of William Morris, as I will call it, is certainly an important strand of Fantasy illustration and art. I would like to begin by showing that Morris had an impact well into the first decades of the 20th century – albeit not on fantastic literature, but more on historical novels, fiction and books for young people. Elbert Hubbard, an American writer and publisher, whose publishing house 'Roycroft Press' was directly oriented towards Morris's Kelmscott Press and its book productions, should be mentioned here first. He also continued the ornamental aesthetics of the Arts & Crafts movement and propagated the movement's goals (Fitzpatrick 2019: 68).

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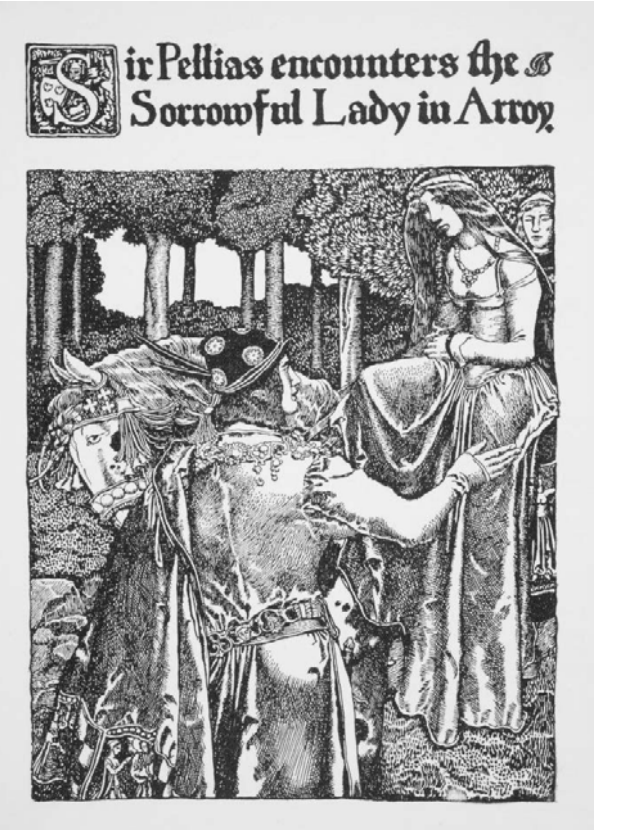
A second successor to Victorian medievalism in book art is Howard Pyle, one of America's most well-known and talented illustrators and writers. He made a name for himself with his illustrated novels on the lives of the American colonists and on King Arthur's Round Table: *The Story of King Arthur and his Knights* (1902), *The Story of the Champions of the Round Table* (1905), *The Story of Sir Launcelot and His Companions* (1907), to name just a few.

Fig. 8: H. Pyle: Sir Pellias encounters the sorrowful Lady in Arroy (1903)



Pyle's illustrations stand out for their historical precision and attention to detail, as well as for their strong narrative quality. He was popular for his ability to create illustrations of authentic living and historic figures, whose movements and actions he was able to bring to life in a fascinating way, making him a forerunner of 20th century pictorial history. His illustrated art cycle helped to shape the popular un-

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derstanding of the Middle Ages in the United States, even though his tales greatly modified the model provided by Thomas Malory.

The corporeality of the characters in illustrations from William Morris's books reflects the aesthetics of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts & Crafts movement, which in turn were oriented towards late medieval Gothic and early Renaissance painting: slender, beautiful, often tall, delicate female and male bodies with historicist, ephemeral clothing and often melancholic facial expressions were depicted in front of mostly medieval, ancient, or renaissance backdrops. In a departure from academy painting, the depiction of figures was more spiritual and mystical-contemplative, in the sense of being lifted up in God and nature, according to the guidelines of the art critic John Ruskin. Romantic and symbolist currents are combined in a fin de siècle aesthetic of medieval influence with numerous poetic and literary references, as can be seen in the pen and ink drawing of Isolde and the tapestry with motifs of the Holy Grail made with Burne-Jones. Burne-Jones's illustrations for the Kelmscott Press likewise exemplify the importance of late-medieval models from book illustration.

Fig. 9: W. Morris: Iseult Boarding the Ship (1857–60, Pencil and Ink, William Morris Gallery, London

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Fig. 10: W. Morris & E. Burne-Jones: The Failure of Sir Gawaine: Sir Gawaine and Sir Uwaine at the Ruined Chapel (1895–96)

I would like to show the *longue durée* of these pictorial patterns by highlighting the Tolkien illustrator Alan Lee, who, congenial to Tolkien's Morris reception, brought his illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings* closer to Morris's figurative models. Visual archetypes from the Victorian aesthetics described above appear both in the design of the medieval background design and in drawings of characters. Lee paints highly aestheticized landscapes in which the viewer marvels at the size of castles, cathedrals, cliffs, seas and trees.

People are usually very small, compared to the forces of nature and architecture. Nevertheless, Morris's formulaic visual language can also be recognized in larger depictions of figures, as can be seen in the two illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings* (Eowyn's farewell to Aragorn and the mirror of Galadriel).[16]

16 Cf. Tolkien 1991 and many subsequent editions of the Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit.

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Fig. 11: Detail from Alan Lee: Minas Tirith, in: J.R.R. Tolkien: The Lord of the Rings (1991)
Fig. 12: Detail from Alan Lee: Eowyn bids Farewell to Aragorn, in: J.R.R. Tolkien: The Lord of the Rings (1991)

Both watercolours show the spiritualized drawing of the figures according to Pre-Raphaelite patterns against a medievalizing background (chivalrous-looking warriors and the mirror reminiscent of a medieval or antique altar); the statuesque, enraptured appearance of the figures in their form of expression and their relationship to one another is also reminiscent of Morris's figurative illustrations. By illustrating the complete edition of *The Lord of the Rings* (1991) and illustrating *The Hobbit* and other works by Tolkien well into the 21st century, but above all by using these illustrations as the basis for the design for Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* film adaptation, Lee has left a lasting mark on the collective imagination of the characters, places and scenes from Tolkien's trilogy.

How can we explain the persistence of such medieval-fantastic figurations and pictorial programs? This might be a good opportunity to make use of Aby Warburg's pathos formula to explain the adaptation of medieval visual archetypes. After all, Morris was already interested in Pre-Raphaelite painting and sculpture, in robes and hair in motion, the tension between spiritual contemplation and physical movement, the static nature of living, expressive images. His figures are often mournful

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or melancholy, thoughtful and reflective, turned inwards. This is not entirely in line with Warburg's pathos formula, which is geared towards moving passions, towards »energetic symbols of action and struggle, expressions for lively movements of physical and spiritual forces« (Ritter 1989: 201–203). Nevertheless, what is meant here are formulaic image patterns, image formulas, whether in motion or still, which are expressive insofar as they are directly related to semantic text content. These semantics, which are often based on emotions such as »suffering« or »devotion« (Sütterlin 2008: 161), are formalized in a fixed visual language. The basic framework of this visual language is the historicist-medieval background, which has an effect both thematically and spatially.

In this respect, one could speak of medieval pathos formulas or, if one wishes to focus on Ruskin's art theory of art as incorporated by Morris, of *medieval ethos formulas*. This could also include the comprehensive ideality of the figures and settings. Instead of the stored and circulating affectivity of pictorial formulas, Fantasy would then place more emphasis on the stored and circulating *ethos* of pictorial formulas, according to my thesis, which I would like to put up for discussion in this article. Singular events can be formalized, stored and reversed through such ethos formulas, in order to then be received and transformed once again, as Fantasy has done through the decades.

A further link between Warburg's pathos formulas and Morris's medieval ethos formulas lies in the attention that both pay to ornamental movement. In Warburg's work, this is the drapery or hair in the wind (dynamograms), whereas in Morris's work it is more the tension between figurative-textile movement and static pictorial delimitation through ornamental framing. These cause the figure to stand still in relation to the formula. At the same time, as already mentioned, the Fantasy figures can often be motionless and absorbed in themselves.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, I will now refer to a few examples from English and German-language Fantasy literature since the 1970s, namely cover illustrations, book illustrations and book decorations with a medieval design. I have divided these heuristically into three aesthetic categories based on the work of William Morris:

1. Ornamentation (type area, frames around illustrations and covers, marginalia in the text, vignettes, bar framing, map decoration)
2. Typography (typesetting, layout, fonts, initials)
3. Images (front and back cover, spine, illustrations)

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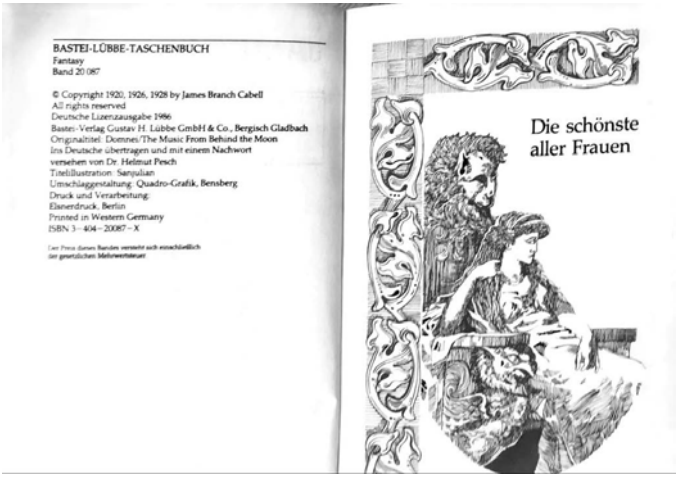
It seems correct to describe all three categories in the framework of medieval book decoration according to Morris's conceptualization, and especially the images (figurative illustrations) can be seen as (neo)medieval *ethos formulas*.[17] I will begin with some examples of authentic and fictitious neomedieval adaptations from the direct reception period of Morris's book decoration and illustration design: 1920 saw the publication of the fantastic novel *Domnei – A Comedy of Women Worship* by James Branch Cabell, author of the successful novel *Jurgen – A Comedy of Justice* (1919), a satirical novel in which the protagonist wanders through medieval-looking dream kingdoms (Jürgen was included in 1981 in German translation in the Fantasy Classics series published by Heyne-Verlag). *Domnei*, in contrast, was not published until 1986 and appeared alongside other texts under the title *Die schönste aller Frauen* in the Fantasy series published by Bastei-Lübbe. However, both so-called Fantasy novels were published with specific aesthetic markers that refer to Victorian book art: large initials for chapter beginnings and figure drawings clearly reminiscent of Victorian medievalism.

Fig. 13: Title page of James Branch Cabell: Domnei, in: Die schönste aller Frauen (1986)



17 I am using 'neomedieval' here instead of 'medieval' (as for Morris and in the 19th century) because this is a consciously ahistorical and selective enactment of the historic Middle Ages. In doing so, I refer to Marshall, who defines *neomedieval* as follows: »a self-conscious, ahistorical, non-nostalgic imagining or reuse of the historical Middle Ages that selectively appropriates iconic images, often from other medievalisms, to construct a presentist space that disrupts traditional depictions of the medieval.« (Marshall 2011: 21–34, 22). Cf. also my recent article on the distinction of terms (Velten 2024: 23–42).

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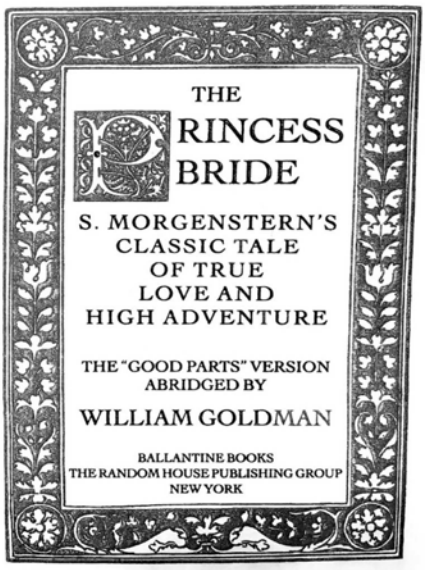
The two figures are static, turned inwards and not towards each other, with a melancholy gaze – they are as if immobilized in the formula »beauty and the beast«, with medieval characteristics limited to the strong border around the edges. Goldman had even made the fictitious claim in the title that his novel was an abridged new version of a first edition by S. Morgenstern from 1928 with the subtitle *A Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure* in order to make the historical-rinascimental plot more credible.

The book decorations for the Fantasy novel *The Princess Bride* by William Goldman (1973) likewise show characteristics from the three categories above: margins with floral patterns, medieval-like print space and typography, as well as an illustration with Victorian style character drawings.

Fig. 14: Title page of William Goldman: The Princess Bride (1973)



However, Fantasy novels that do not directly refer to the medieval enthusiasm of the 19th and early 20th centuries also make use of the ornamental, typographical and pictorial patterns of Victorianism. These also include works of fiction with a certain literary appeal, such as T.H. White's *Der König auf Camelot* from 1982, originally published in English in 1958 (*The Once and Future King*). The cover of the Klett-Cotta edition presents not a medieval, but rather an art déco font from the 1920s;

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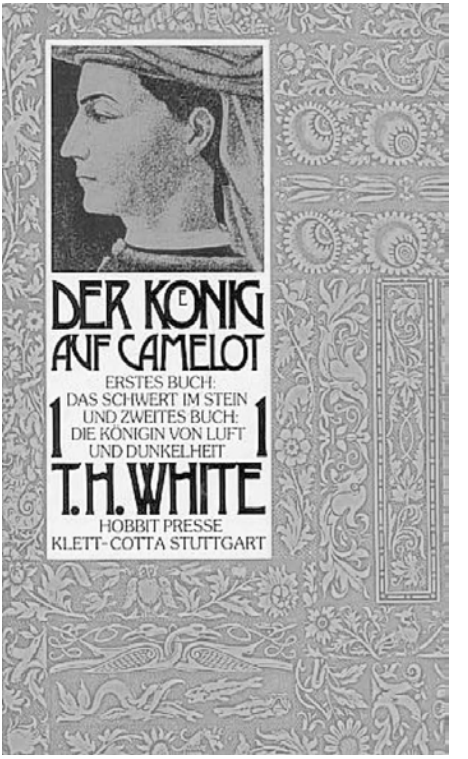
however, the early-humanistic style of illustration, combined with oversized leaves in the marginalia and multiple floral and animal motifs on the cover, do recall late medieval book arts as we have seen from Morris's Kelmscott Press.

Fig. 15: Cover of T.H. White: Der König auf Camelot (1982)



A large ornamental, neo-mediaeval framework with magical creatures such as dragons and unicorns also comprise the cover illustration of the 2001 published *Die Priesterin von Avalon* which appeared in the Avalon series by Marion Z. Bradley. The illustration shows a woman in a red costume (of unspecified vintage) in a thick forest, holding aloft a richly decorated, medieval sword.

The illustration and parts of it can be found in reduced size in the frame, the allegorical marginalia also on the spine. Instead, typographical features are missing, replaced by the handwritten title, which in turn points to the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages. The title page of George R.R. Martin's fifth volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *A Dance with Dragons* from 2011, appears less distinctive.

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Fig. 16: Front and Back Cover of Marion Z. Bradley: Die Priesterin von Avalon (2001)

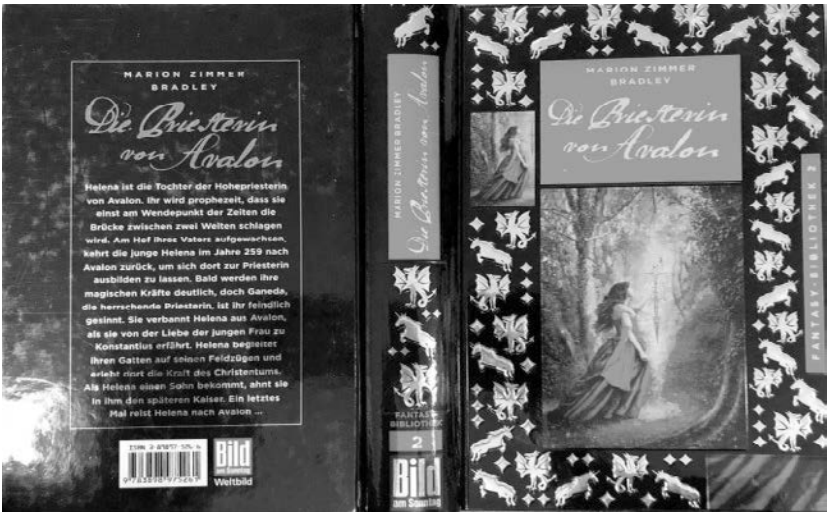
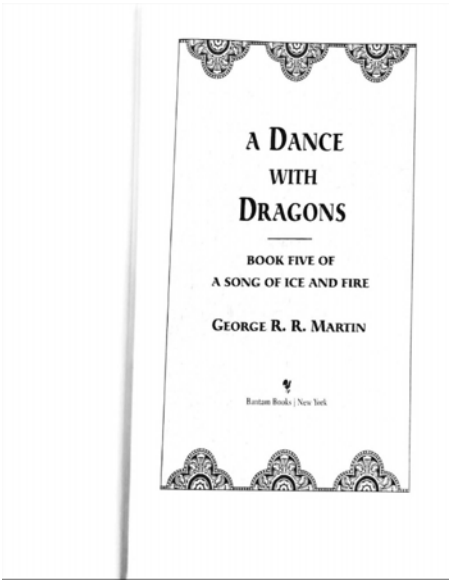


Fig. 17: Title page of G.R.R. Martin: A Dance with Dragons (2011)



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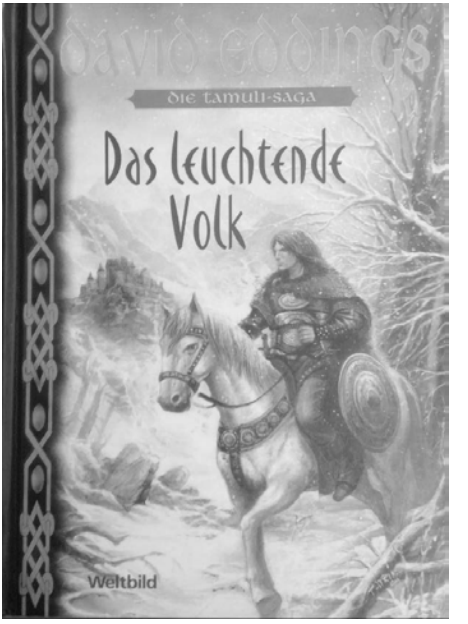
However, medieval framing decorations in the style of the Kelmscott Press can also be seen here, as in the rest of the type area of the book. Smaller vignettes in this style can be found at the beginning and end of chapters in the book, so that the motifs run through the entire book design.[18]

Two other more recent examples are the cover of David Edding's novel *Das leuchtende Volk* (2004) and the cover of the first volume of Bernhard Hennen's Elfen series *Die Elfen* (2005). On the cover of Edding's novel, a warrior in early medieval armor rides through the snow with a stern look in his eyes; a Gothic castle can be seen in the background and the whole thing is delimited on the left by an amulet-like border. The colors used in the marginalia reflect those used for the knight and the title font.

Fig. 18: Front Cover of David Eddings: Das leuchtende Volk (2004)



While the colorful cover refers to Fantasy traditions from the 1980s, these features in turn recall illustration conventions from Victorian-medieval book and visual aesthetics. This can be seen even better in the second example of *Die Elfen*, where the

18 Cf. the article by Theresa Specht in this volume.

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type area for the start of the chapter headed *Das Volk der Freien* uses a neomedieval font and is bordered by an almost half-page illustration on the right.

Fig. 19: Illustration Chapter 40: Das Volk der Freien of Bernhard Hennen: Die Elfen (2005)

This in turn shows a crowned lady elf with long hair leaning against a gnarled, magical-looking tree, whose branches are, as it were, embracing the type area. Alongside multiple other heraldic signs and decorative vignettes, the book art here is consistently neomedieval, which gives the text a whole range of atmospheric reference points.

The genre of the Fantasy novel, especially the subgenre of *Epic Fantasy*, thus demonstrates the persistence of visual medieval and neomedieval aesthetic patterns. The covers mentioned and shown, the illustrations as well as the typeface and book design exhibit content-related and formal characteristics of the three aesthetic categories developed by Morris above: ornament, typography and image.

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Hundreds of German and English-language book editions could easily be listed here, which have the same characteristics but cannot be shown for reasons of space.

The publisher's decision to use medieval-looking visual conventions and fonts as well as book art conventions for the book design not only refers to the content of the Fantasy, which in many cases follows a neomedieval grammar (cf. Velten 2024a: 124–151), but also (and above all) to the recognizability of (neo)medieval ethos formulas of book design, which have been tangible since Victorian art and William Morris as its most important representative, and which are still handed down and being transformed by the genre of Fantasy all through to the present.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: Opening page of The Story of the Glittering Plain or the Land of the Living Men (W. Morris). Illustration: W. Crane. Kelmscott Press 1890, available online: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kelmscott_Press.

Fig. 2: Opening page of The Wood beyond the World (W. Morris). Illustration E. Burne-Jones (Kelmscott Press, 1894) featuring a feminine figure (the visionary Maid), the same as female protagonist Birdalone in The Water of the Wondrous Islands.

Fig. 3: W. Morris & E. Burne-Jones: Verdure with Deer and Shields IV (Quest for the Holy Grail Tapisseries; Morris & Co. 1900.

Fig. 4: Opening page of Eusebius: De Evangelica Praeparatione (Venetiae: Nicolas Jenson 1470, roman antiqua).

Fig. 5: J.R.R. Tolkien: Númenórean Tile from Elenna preserved in Gondor (1960) Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Tolkien Drawings 91, fol. 14.

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Fig. 6: J.R.R. Tolkien: Floral Designs and Borders; Númenórean Ceramic Grass Patterns; Border Designs (1960) Bodleian Library, MS Tolkien Drawings 94, fol. 65, 11, 66.

Fig. 7: Opening page of Felix Shay: Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora (New York: William H. Wise & Co. 1926) in the style of E. Hubbards book openings.

Fig. 8: H. Pyle: Sir Pellias encounters the sorrowful Lady in Arroy. Illustration for the book The Story of King Arthur and His Knights, New York: Ch. Scribner's & Sons, 1903. Pen and black ink over graphite and paper. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Fig. 9: W. Morris: Iseult Boarding the Ship (1857–60); Pencil and Ink, William Morris Gallery, London.

Fig. 10: W. Morris & E. Burne-Jones: The Failure of Sir Gawaine: Sir Gawaine and Sir Uwaine at the Ruined Chapel, Number 4 of the Holy Grail tapestries woven by Morris & Co. 1891–94 for Stanmore Hall. This version woven by Morris & Co. for Lawrence Hodson of Compton Hall 1895–96. Wool and silk on cotton warp. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

Fig. 11: Detail from Alan Lee: Minas Tirith. Illustration for Book V, Chapter I, Minas Tirith, The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. London/New York 1991, available online: https://arthur.io/art/alan-lee/minas-tirith Copyright Alan Lee.

Fig. 12: Detail from Alan Lee: Eowyn bids Farewell to Aragorn. Illustration for Book V, Chapter II, The Passing of the Grey Company, The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. London/New York 1991, available online: https://arthur.io/art/alan-lee/lady-eowyn-bids-farewell-to-aragorn, Copyright Alan Lee.

Fig. 13: Title page of James Branch Cabell: Domnei, in: Die schönste aller Frauen (German transl. of Domnei. The Music from behind the Moon (1928). Verlag Bastei-Lübbe, Bergisch-Gladbach 1986.

Fig. 14: Title page of William Goldman: The Princess Bride. New York: Ballantine Books 1973.

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Unicorns in Contemporary Popular Culture

Joseph Imorde

I hope nobody will object if I begin with a fairly average anecdote from my English friend Fabio Barry. When I mentioned the topic of my article en passant, over coffee, he told me about an ongoing contest with his former mentor at the University of Cambridge, the architectural historian Peter Carl. The aim of the competition is to see who can find the funniest combination of name and title in a book by a German scholar. The more abstruse and silly the result, the better. With the condescending attitude that the British often display towards German scholarship, Fabio chose a book by Stephan Steingräber, a classical archaeologist who teaches in Rome. The author's name means 'stone digger' or 'stone graves' and the title is *Antike Felsgräber unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der etruskischen Felsgräbernekropole* (cf. Steingräber 2015). In response, his mentor named a study which is important in our context: a book by Jürgen Werinhard Einhorn (whose surname means 'unicorn', cf. Caroutch 1997: 512) entitled *Spiritalis unicornis. Das Einhorn als Bedeutungsträger in Literatur und Kunst des Mittelalters* (Spiritalis unicornis: The unicorn as a bearer of meaning in the literature and art of the Middle Ages, cf. Einhorn 1998). It really would be hard to make this up – and it certainly gave the two British scholars great cause for hilarity.

Spiritalis Unicornis, written by Einhorn, a Franciscan friar and submitted as a doctoral thesis at the University of Kiel in 1970, was published by Fink in 1974 and reissued by the same publisher, with substantial revisions, in 1998. According to Einhorn's own statement, his choice of topic was influenced by »personal inclination«: He had been unable to resist the temptation to let his name point him towards a »related« object of study (ibid.: 13). Einhorn set the year 1530 as the cut-off date for his countless literary and visual examples, justifying this, in the first edition, with the assertion that the unicorn had »lost the abundance of its meanings« in the modern era (ibid.: 16). This view was obviously open to contestation, and in the second edition the author himself struck a less absolute tone. Here he at least hinted at how much the motif had been used in modernity, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – from Rainer Maria Rilke's poems (1906, 1907, 1922) to Peter S. Beagle's novel *The Last Unicorn* (1968), and from Arnold Böcklin's difficult painting, *Schweigen im Walde* (1896) to a work by the artist Rebecca Horn – a 1970 performance entitled

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Einhorn.[1] Einhorn argued that these »curiosities« in the literary and artistic response to the unicorn should be recognized as »data for a history of mentalities«, since these many different unicorns might reveal the »fears and longings« of the present day (ibid.: 87).

Of course, this had a long tradition. It was the motif's heterogeneity and adaptability that allowed the Christian Middle Ages to evoke it in a wide range of contexts. The unicorn was always »bound to a semantics of oppositions« (Hörisch 1986: 204). It was notable for its contradictions: this animal from the Orient became »the cult animal of Western Christianity; it symbolized both Christ *and* the Prince of Darkness«; it was »the most chaste animal, despite its obvious fertile/phallic qualities«; it was »as terrible as it was beautiful, and as wild as it was mild; it both threatened and healed; it had a terrifying roar yet loved music«. And of course, there was always one question that remained unanswered: Did the unicorn ever actually exist, or not (ibid.: 205)? We can quote Jochen Hörich's summary: »The medieval unicorn is inconceivable without the paradoxes and puzzles that it presents. The reason why 'early and high Christian culture courted the unicorn so assiduously' was its ability 'to give seemingly innocent expression to experiences of ambivalence« (ibid.).

Fig. 1: Unicorn Frappucino. Starbucks 2017.

The question is whether this ambivalence can still be found in today's popular culture. To answer this, it is worth looking at the 'unicorn fever' that swept over the United States in 2016 and 2017, bringing forth astonishing forms of appropriation. On the entertainment website *Refinery 29*, which seeks to appeal to young women,

1 Further references in Einhorn 1999: 75–106, here 85.

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Arianna Davis put it as follows: » [In 2017] Unicorns morphed from a millennia-long symbol […] to a full-on cultural phenomenon. « (Davis 2017). The American food industry was particularly active in promoting this trend, having discovered the sales-boosting potential of this mythical beast (Fig. 1).

Starbucks set a creamy milestone with its 'Unicorn Frappuccino', available as a limited edition for one week in April 2017. The firm promised no more and no less than an experience: »Magical flavors start off sweet and fruity transforming to pleasantly sour. Swirl it to reveal a color-changing spectacle of purple and pink. It's finished with whipped cream-sprinkled pink and blue fairy powders.«[2] Even the green straw had magical powers. On the one hand it was meant to match the colour of the Starbucks logo, a two-tailed mermaid (green to reflect the company's origins in the 'Emerald City', Seattle). On the other hand, it was supposed to symbolize the unicorn's horn, through which anyone who had managed to capture a limited-edition Unicorn Frappuccino could now suck out and imbibe the mythical creature's creamy soul.

Fig. 2: Unicorn Froot Loops, 2023

This unicornization of the Frappuccino set a precedent. Unicorns now appear everywhere, particularly in packaging design. Often attributes are added to boost

2 Author's archive.

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the product's narrative and emotional appeal. A striking feature here is the frequent use of the rainbow, now an indispensable addition. But of course, other elements are also deployed: clouds, stars, and occasionally fairytale medieval castles (Fig. 2).

On Kellogg's limited-edition 'Unicorn Froot Loops', the image on the box also shows a rising sun – a reference to the product's function as a breakfast cereal. On the packaging for Kraft's unicorn-themed 'Mac & Cheese', which is marketed as a dinner and illustrated accordingly, the pieces of pasta have been magically transformed into pictures. Children can now eat unicorns, rainbows and stars – and dream sweet dreams.

Fig. 3: Inkee Unicorn. Bath Bomb with surprise, 2022. Craze GmbH, Karlsruhe

Alongside the food industry, which sinks to abject depths in its exploitation of the unicorn theme, the hygiene and cosmetics industry has also made intensive use of this medieval motif – and with good reason. The many unicorn-themed soaps, shower gels, shampoos and bath additives effortlessly reconnect with history, re-activating the ideas of innocence and purity that were associated with this animal, particularly in Mariological contexts. In the words of Arianna Davis, »[…] somehow unicorns evolved from icons of chastity and purity embroidered on 15th century tapestries to the sparkly-eyed, pastel-hued toys that dominated the 'girls' aisle in the 1980s« (ibid.). This is an allusion to the incredibly successful 'My Little Pony' figures,

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which were first launched by American toymaker Hasbro in 1982 and continue to be reissued in new versions even today. Their enduring success eventually led to the production of the animated series *My Little Pony – Friendship is Magic*, currently available on Netflix (cf. Hasbro, online). The most recent version of the animated figures, the 'New Generation', seems to be trying to get away from the girly image of the band of ponies so as to address the 'queer' element in child consumers (Fig. 3).

Traces of the unicorn's qualities of »chastity and purity« can be found even in bath bombs – made by a company called Craze GmbH in Karlsruhe. The six collectible plastic figurines embody the core element of the high medieval signum of the unicorn, innocence. As with the ponies, they present an inseparable amalgam of unblemished chastity and 'cuteness' – a quality that has frequently been described and theorized in recent years (cf. Ngai 2005: 811–847).

The reason why the concept of cuteness (defined most notably by the cultural theorist Sianne Ngai) seems so helpful for describing today's popular culture is that – like the unicorn itself – it is characterized by inherent tension. This is partly to do with the fact that the term 'cuteness' has its origins in 'acuteness', which has been ground down into its opposite. In other words, this is the literal blunting of *acutezza*, another relevant concept within the history of ideas. The cutting away of the first syllable (the technical term is apheresis) turns the meaning of the original word on its head. Sharp and pointy contrasts with soft and round; mental acuity with sweetness, sleepiness, and insouciance (Ngai 2022: 110–111). The English word (unlike its German translation, *Niedlichkeit*,) reflects the polarity that is always present in the concept. Historically, the use of 'cute' can be traced back to the 1850s. What is interesting, in this context, is that the term evidently emerged in the domestic sphere of the American middle-class family. From the very beginning, it belonged to the semantic field of women and children and described a »feminine spectacle« which played out mainly in domestic interiors (Dale et al. 2017: 2). Acuteness, with its masculine connotations, reaches out into the world and expends its energy in other arenas – or at least this is the hypothesis of Joshua Dale et al. in the introduction to their 2017 book *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness*.

As a side note, a young Sigmund Freud had already noted the universal validity of the mechanism that can be glimpsed in the concept of 'cuteness', that is, the practice of securing happiness within the family. In a 1883 letter to his later wife, Martha Bernays, Freud describes his conception of a shared domestic idyll. As he sees it, their future home has two areas. On the one hand, there are objects and tools that bear witness to 'serious work'; these are part of everyday life and are therefore subject to constant change; they wear out, become old-fashioned or lose their value. On the other hand, there are things that reveal *Kunstsinn* (literally a 'sense of art', variously translated as an artistic sensibility or a feeling for beauty). These objects are removed from the contingent vicissitudes of life and the modern pressure for renewal and can therefore serve to reify what is thought to be permanent. Their func-

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tion consists in filling living spaces with emotions, personalizing them, and thus transforming them into »a small world of happiness«, as Freud calls it. The home is populated with »silent friends and proofs of lofty human values«, with mementoes, knick-knacks, souvenirs, in short, with little things that can radiate magic, but are also allowed to be soft and sweet. »Are we to hang our hearts on such little things?«, asks Freud in his letter. The answer is: »Yes, and without hesitation, so long as some event beyond our control does not knock on the silent door« (Freud 1992: 27). It is the *Kunstsinn* described here that decorates the interior with universal gestures to secure happiness, driven by the desire for an existence without threat. Anything that is questionable, anything that is acute must remain outside, leaving the interior enclosed in cute insouciance. In Freud's vision, domestic happiness is already conceived as a reduction in complexity and thus in effort.

In practices for securing happiness, the ephemeral nature of first impressions, for example the transience of previously observed cuteness, invites modification. Cuteness needs to be transformed into something else in order to remain available as a trace of its own historicity for future acts of presentification. Seen in this light, what is commonly defamed as 'kitsch' seems to be the materialization and enactment of a once-observed cuteness. It is not the baby or kitten itself that is kitschy, but the pink-framed picture of the baby or kitten on the wall. Mere cuteness is replaced by preserved emotion, which, as a built-in trigger for storytelling, justifies the objects' existence. This process, this building in of sentiment, gives each object its own specific quality.

Practices of emotional reshaping, which will later be resurrected as nostalgia, also ensure that this mythical beast – previously tamed by the maiden in her *hortus conclusus* – can give fluffy form to innocence and purity even today. The pinnacle of cuteness are undoubtedly the 'Glubschis', soft toys produced by the German company NICI. Anyone contemplating these toys, especially the unicorns, may find themselves concurring with brand strategist Jess Weiner, who applied a history of mentalities approach to the American 'unicorn fever'. She gave her statement a strangely feminist touch:

> Women are in need of fantastical magic in their lives right now, because we're surrounded by culture and politics that are very bleak and dark and oppressive, […]. Unicorns are rare, they're powerful, and they're imaginary, so they're capable of anything. And they do have a certain girly undertone because many of us associate them with our childhood, so they're unapologetically feminine.
> Why *wouldn't* we own something that's just for us and inspires us to believe in our otherworldly capabilities? We're being faced with some dire messaging around

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> being female. Unicorns are our chance to escape and have some fun. (Weiner, online)[3]

If we take Weiner seriously, the cuteness that may have triggered the purchase of unicorn ponies or NICI products from the Glubschi series does not actually play a crucial role. What is important about the objects is that they make it possible to enter a magical kingdom, far from the multitude of everyday threats, where images of a better past can be kept safe (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Glubschi Unicorn Vita-Mi, 2020. Nici GmbH, Altenkunstadt

Sweetness and softness may be the initial incentive to buy, but it is only once the 'Glubschi Ballerina Unicorn Lady Moon' has been absorbed into the secure and reassuring domestic soft toy emporium that she can, in the distant future, remind us of the mystical happiness of childhood that we once experienced.

The unvarying wide-eyed gaze of the unicorn Glubschis promises to offer self-assurance to sensitive souls. It can come as no surprise that taste, in such spheres of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*), is largely autonomous. The assimilated objects are used in a highly self-willed and self-confident manner to subvert aesthetic orders and norms. Decorative self-reliance and sentimental autism come to the fore. The

3 See also: (Davis 2017, online).

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dominant attitude is a benevolent inclination towards kitschifying permanence, which can confidently mock the rationalist standards of a supposedly objective theory of the aesthetic by looking at the evidence of personal experience. Emotions, condensed into reliquaries and stereotypical narratives, aim at consistency, at the unchangeable, at triggers for storytelling – and they happily tolerate clichés.

Archives of the subjective are forming everywhere, because it is only the image and object worlds of the private sphere that give a home to a historicizing self-narration. One of the dominant forces in these refuges is certified cuteness; it reigns here as the will to represent one's own being and one's own historicity. This reaches its dialectical apex in the fact that the formative character of cultural history weakens to the same extent to which consumptive processes for generating historical meaning are set in motion, and media of self-empowerment and self-archiving, in their affordability, claim to be able to safeguard the personal as a universal. The many unicorns in children's bedrooms today offer to magically secure happiness. The idea is that they will remedy, on a small scale, what cannot be achieved on a large scale, and set in order the aspects of the world and of history that are not understood, be it as figures from a band of pony friends, or in a book of puzzles, a sticker book, or a scratch art album.

As Jürgen Werinhard Einhorn intimated, the examples provide data for a contemporary history of mentalities, since they are subject to ideological and economic modelling. At heart, their objective is insouciance; they market the apparent absence of any threat.

The idiosyncratic nature of the many commodified triggers for remembering becomes precarious, however, at the point where the private archives lose their custodians – and suddenly no one has any idea what to do with all the unicorns. The collections of material feeling and materialized remembering become somewhat tragic when the feelings and (hi)stories preserved with them fall into oblivion, and the artefacts, now with no point of reference, are thrown back upon themselves. Mike Kelley's *Stuffed Toys* owe their unsettling effect to this kind of loss of attention. But precisely because of Evidence of the sentimentalization of personal history can be found everywhere and in every epoch, across genders and independent of class. The filling of the household with *Kunstsinn* solidifies into an emotional frame to give stability and protection to individual lives.

Enveloped in such a mantle of objects, gestures and images, people believe themselves to be immunized against references to the Other and the outside, change and death. Why? Because once we are inside an enclosure full of our own things our uncertainty ceases; because we 'feel' at home there, and because there are stories to tell there. This takes on separatist, exclusive, even militant overtones at the point where home becomes a castle – or a *hortus conclusus*. What might this have to do with 'freedom'? Martin Heidegger attempted to deduce this in his famous lecture 'Bauen, Wohnen, Denken' (Building, dwelling, thinking) in 1951. To answer the initi-

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al question, »[…] worin besteht das Wesen des Wohnens?« (translated as »What is it to dwell?«), he resorts to etymology, and reaches back into the unicorn-rich Middle Ages:

> The Old Saxon *wuon*, the Gothic *wunian* like the old world *bauen*, mean to remain, to stay in a place. But the Gothic *wunian* says more distinctly how this remaining is experienced. *Wunian* means: to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, *Friede*, means the free, das *Frye*, and *fry* means: preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded. To free really means to spare. […] Real sparing is something positive and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature, when we return it specifically to its being, when we 'free' it in the real sense of the word into a preserve of peace. To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is sparing and preserving (Heidegger 1971: 149).

Undoubtedly, the average sense of self-worth tends to make itself at home – or, philosophically speaking, enclose itself (*sich einfrieden*) – in the banality of its own appropriation of history and explanation of the world. Wherever we go, we meet museum-like formations of the subjective. Because it is only the object and image worlds of the private sphere that seem to constitute what is generally described as a home, and what Heidegger postulates as a 'dwelling with things' – and this includes dwelling with unicorns. We hang our hearts on little things and say yes, without hesitation. Triggers for storytelling are 'recovered' (*zurückgeborgen*) and – on the fridge, on the wall, or on the shelf – attest to mass-produced wellbeing. We thereby enclose and preserve gestures of emotional reassurance, which, in their framing and repeatability, open up residues of the self. The unicorn seems a natural fit for this task.

Sianne Ngai imputes an extreme passivity to the cute object; she sees it as the most thing-like thing among things, the most objectified of all objects, an object par excellence (cf. Ngai 2005: 834). This can only be correct if we disregard the practices of co-opted subjectification which seek to create object-generated obliviousness to the world, cocooned in cosy harmlessness – practices for securing happiness that are as ubiquitous as unicorns in contemporary popular culture. Arguably the most important of these unicorns, incidentally, is one I have not yet mentioned: the mega-successful, ultra-hip 'Neinhorn' (a play on words combining the German words for 'no' and 'unicorn') created by Marc-Uwe Kling and Astrid Henn. This can be dealt with in another essay – or not, as the case may be.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: ›Starbucks' unicorn drink is pushing adults to the edge of insanity‹, Source: https://nypost.com/2017/04/21/starbucks-unicorn-drink-is-pushing-adults-to-the-edge-of-insanity/ [accessed: 1 March 2024].

Fig. 2: ›Kellogg's® Unicorn Froot Loops®‹, Source: https://www.kelloggs.com/me/en-kw/products/unicorn-froot-loops/unicorn-froot-loops-cereal.html [accessed: 1 March 2024].

Fig. 3: Author

Fig. 4: ›Die süßeste Invasion kommt von NICI‹, Source: https://www.nici.de/ueber-nici/neuigkeiten-von-nici/die-suesseste-invasion-kommt-von-nici [accessed: 1 March 2024].

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Fantasy Medievalism

On the Aesthetic of the Mythical

Racha Kirakosian

Our image of the Middle Ages is contaminated. But is there actually a pure, authentic Middle Ages behind it? This notion – the hypothetical existence of an authentic Middle Ages – has been called into question by the historian and cultural studies scholar Valentin Groebner. The material he examines consists of books, photographs, advertising texts, and other marketing strategies, particularly those used in the tourist industry. My paper, in contrast, will bring together two groups of sources which are seldom analysed together: medieval literature and the TV series *Game of Thrones*. When medieval texts are associated with *Game of Thrones*, it is usually with the aim of tracing historical or literary instances that served as inspiration for the popular series. Such comparisons have already been carried out many times and this is not my objective here. In juxtaposing medieval texts – specifically the literary material concerned with Mélusine and Herzog Ernst – with the *Game of Thrones* series, my aim is to develop the idea of an aesthetic of the mythical. I will begin by (1) addressing the place of medievalism in the Fantasy film genre and (2) explaining my concept of myth, before (3) considering – with reference to the objects of this study – what an aesthetic of the mythical could mean. As we will see, medieval sources themselves already contain mythical dimensions.

1. Medievalism in the Fantasy Film Genre

Since Tolkien's creation of Middle Earth, his specific notion of the European Middle Ages has served as the standard backdrop for Fantasy worlds. Some decades before Tolkien, the popularity of the historical novel had already laid the groundwork for a ›return of the Middle Ages‹. This was one of many revivals of the Middle Ages in the modern era, as described by Umberto Eco in his essay *Dreaming of the Middle Ages* (1986: 63).[1] Today the Fantasy film – and here I include the HBO series *Game of Thrones*

1 See also Eco: »Immediately after the official ending of the Middle Ages, Europe was ravaged by a pervasive medieval nostalgia« (Eco 1986: 66).

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(2011–2019) – displays, arguably more than any other genre, processes of appropriation that deploy various more or less dominant notions of the Middle Ages. This type of creative reception of the medieval past, which is inspired by history but lays no claim to historical accuracy, can be aesthetically and intellectually appealing.[2] Yet there is a fundamental difference between history and the past: the past is irrevocably gone, whereas history is about the representation of this absent past. In the words of Groebner, »It [history; R.K.] must be recounted and presented« (Groebner 2013: 408f.). In this sense, every image of the Middle Ages, whether produced and consumed in an academic or popular context, is fundamentally a construction.

At the same time, there is undoubtedly a discrepancy between the frequently reproduced stereotypes of the Middle Ages and the world that medievalists study in their research.[3] This disparity between historical research and popular perceptions is certainly, though not exclusively, due to the academic structures and traditions of the study of the Middle Ages itself. A perennial problem in my field, medieval studies, is the term 'Middle Ages' itself and its geographical implications. To name just one of the issues: the use of the term to refer to the period between around 500 and 1500 arose in connection with European history, whereas large parts of the world periodize their past differently.[4]

Conceptions of the Middle Ages are the product of countless overlaps between imaginary projections, often influenced by political and economic interests. These condense to form a supposed whole, which is then related to the past on the basis of a temporal separation, meaning that the period is perceived as long gone. Groebner uses the term »post-production« to describe this process; post-production works with images of affect and with the use of emotions (Groebner 2013: 428).

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2 At the same time, we can also currently observe a political instrumentalization of the reception of the Middle Ages, e.g. when alt-right groups use runes to promote the idea of a medieval, white, male-dominated European past. One example is the so-called Nordic Resistance Movement, the Nordiska motståndsrörelsen, a political party in Sweden, which embraces a proto-national and ahistorical idea of the North. Politicized forms of medievalism correspond to Eco's sixth type of nostalgic thinking about the Middle Ages – the Middle Ages of 'national identities', celebrating a putative former grandeur (cf. Eco 1986: 70).

3 This imbalance caught the interest of the media a few years ago. Dorothy Kim, for example, wrote about the need to reclaim the history of the Vikings, which white racists were using for their imaginary past (Kim 2019). Other articles have drawn attention to a more widespread misuse of the Middle Ages, which also affects academia; see e.g. Gabriele/Rambaran-Olm 2019.

4 Academics have begun to seek new ways to periodize the Middle Ages, by calling into question geographic definitions, e.g. Kulke 2016. However, Central Asia is often overlooked, as Yücel Sivri noted critically in his review of Kulke's book (Sivri 2017). The Centre for Medieval Literature also encourages efforts to build networks that extend beyond the European region. See https://cml.sdu.dk [accessed 26 August 2020]. See also Cohen 2000a and Borgolte 2022.

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In his study on the development of the tourist industry, Groebner evokes the quest for the authentic, which highlights the relevance of stereotypes of the Middle Ages for identity politics. In tourism, which is based on images of artificial worlds, projections of the Middle Ages become a code for authenticity. Just as »tourism is an image machine, which literally creates economic realities from imaginings« (Groebner 2013: 409), the Fantasy genre has developed its own medieval repertoire, generating billions of dollars in earnings.[5] Here I see clear functional parallels between the exploitation of history in the tourism industry and the medievalism encountered in the Fantasy genre.

Medievalism relates to a concept of the Middle Ages based on a concentration of superimposed projections. One way to conceptualize how these projections come together is what Astrid Erll has called the construction of places of memory via »premediation« and »remediation«. In »premediation«, images are transferred from the media into our collective memory, supplying the thought patterns with which we then encounter new experiences and representations. »Remediation« occurs when this repertoire is repeatedly reproduced, creating a canon of existing media which no longer has any connection to an original event (Erll 2012).[6] The characteristics of the specific media are crucial in medievalist processes of projection, since they largely dictate the conditions of perception and interpretation that define something which I call the aesthetic of the mythical.

Medievalisms in film were the subject of a 2008 monograph by Nickolas Haydock, informed by psychoanalysis and media philosophy. Although Haydock makes no distinction between historicizing films about the Middle Ages and Fantasy films, it is worth summarizing a few points from his study, which clarify the special nature of medievalism in (Fantasy) film. Haydock's reading of Lacan, in particular Lacan's concept of the imaginary, is based on the interpretation of Lacan scholar Malcolm Bowie: »The Imaginary is the order of mirror-images, identifications and reciprocities. It is the dimension of experience in which the individual seeks not simply to placate the Other but to dissolve his otherness by becoming his counterpart […]« (Bowie 1993: 92; quoted in Haydock 2008: 7). The imaginary as a hall of mirrors, a repertoire for identification, and an interplay that serves to draw boundaries – all this can be applied to notions of the Middle Ages. In Fantasy film, such notions create the impression of another world; this casts the viewer's own world as the Other, promoting identification with its counterpart.

5 One example is the films based on Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003) and *The Hobbit or There and Back Again* (2012–2014), also extended into a trilogy. Just one of the films, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, generated 1.12 billion US dollars globally; all six films together made just under 6 billion US dollars (see Harms 2023).

6 I wish to thank Lea von Berg for drawing my attention to Astrid Erll's research.

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A further analytical category used by Haydock stems from the work of Gilles Deleuze and concerns his idea of »l'image-temps« (see Deleuze 1985). According to Haydock, a subcategory of the medievalist film follows this principle, which he also refers to as the »time machine«. These are films that are set in an earlier time but are actually about contemporary crises. One example is Ingmar Bergman's *Seventh Seal* (*Det sjunde inseglet*, 1957), which was produced under the shadow of the nuclear threat in post-war Europe, but tells the story of a crusader and his interaction with personified Death during the time of the plague. Medievalist films, so it seems, appear to be particularly well suited to presenting and exploring contemporary problems in the guise of a past epoch. Another example of this »time machine« in the Fantasy genre is the feared arrival of winter in *Game of Thrones*, which could be interpreted as mirroring the contemporary climate crisis.

In his discussion of Arthurian cinema, Haydock works with a »pincer approach«, considering the studied material from two sides. With reference to Siegfried Kracauer, he writes:

> Kracauer's realist aesthetic and his suspicion of both fantasy and historical cinema (for him much the same thing) represent one arm of my pincer approach to Arthurian cinémedievalism and digitization. With Kracauer I view mass entertainment as the distilled expression of collective desires, which serve not merely to reflect but also to intensify things like patriotism, nostalgia for charismatic leadership, or a belief in the historical destiny of nations. (Haydock 2008: 166; referring to Kracauer 1960: 77–91)

Haydock's next point of reference is Jean Baudrillard:

> The second pincer of my approach is what Baudrillard has called the 'procession of simulacra' into the realm of the hyperreality, where both reference and history are fatally attenuated in spasms of reproduction. The apparent contradiction in Baudrillard's theory of the hyperreal is his insistence upon both the erosion of reference to any reality whatsoever as well as the postmodern obsession with technologies of its accurate representation. (Haydock 2008: 166; referring to Baudrillard 1994: 1–42)

The medievalist film, then, is characterized by a politicized heightening of emotions, the gradual dismantling of a realistic frame of reference, and, at the same time, an increasing sense of realism enhanced by technology.

One particular combination in film is that of medievalism and Orientalism, as can be observed in the motif of the crusade.[7] Since David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1962, there have been expectations about what a »typical Western film set in the

7 See the edited volume by Haydock/Risden 2009.

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East« should look like. John M. Ganim describes it as »an uncannily stable visual projection of history, a message that the world it portrays is empty, silent and timeless, punctuated by brief images of crowds in the bazaar or armies on the battlefield« (Ganim 2009: 31). This cinematic aesthetic of the timeless 'Orient' has iconographic precursors. The cinematic concept of the 'Orient' has its roots in early photography and nineteenth-century art production, and thus in highly staged images which often recreated medievalist settings. This harks back to a tradition in which Islamic architecture, in the Romantic period and in the colonial age, was perceived as medieval(ist). Imagined Orientalist interiors as depicted in the nineteenth century reappear in films. »Thus, rich hangings, carpets and wall coverings became the sign of the Eastern interior, especially in the Middle Ages« (ibid.: 33). This setting – which worked with strikingly stable stereotypes – also included the personnel associated with the inner realm of the house, such as scantily clad belly dancers: »The sets and locations of motion pictures set in the Middle East comprise a remarkably consistent, but varied, visual array« (ibid.: 35f.). The association of magic with the Orient dates back to the early days of cinema and Georges Méliès's 1907 comedy *Ali Barbajou et Ali Boufà l'Huile*. Méliès, a trained magician, used his technical knowledge to give cinematic form to the image of a magical Orient. In his film, narrative special effects are equated with Oriental magic (ibid.: 36). The excess of »orientalist visual vocabularies« (ibid.) used to create a Middle-Eastern decor, as in Méliès's film, can also be seen in film adaptations of the Fantasy genre. The tradition of an opulent interior contrasted with an empty desert landscape – although »this semiotic opposition between an interior setting of excess and an exterior setting of emptiness is not always as clear-cut as we might expect« – has passed into a kind of collective memory of cinema-goers: »The landscape of Crusades films, like that of biblical epic films, is a landscape of collective memory« (ibid.: 45). Even if Orientalist images may have changed since the middle of the twentieth century, and Oriental landscapes no longer necessarily appear as mythical and timeless, the above-mentioned stereotypes and patterns still have a firm place in the cinematic repertoire of Orientalist films – which, incidentally, are not produced exclusively in the West.

In the research presented above, no distinction is made between historicizing medievalist films and the Fantasy genre. This is to be welcomed, since precise differentiation in medievalist »post-production« would be impossible and in any case questionable: in both types of film, medievalist images undergo the same process of canonization. If we juxtapose Groebner's analysis of stereotypes of the Middle Ages in popular culture with research on the medievalist (Fantasy) film, we can see parallels in the way that medievalist notions are perceived and utilized. A »supposedly fixed temporality« is made elastic and available for personal experience (Groebner 2018: 34). Moreover, it is historical novels and films that generate a sense of history within modernity. Images familiar from these novels and films appear as »›proper‹ or ›original‹ historical events«, which then feed into the »imaginings of ›times past‹«

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(Groebner 2013: 427). »In this post-production of the past«, Groebner argues, »the connections with images of affect from other media (historical paintings, novels and films) clearly play an important part. For the use of history in tourism, artificiality is not an obstacle, but a reservoir of possibilities« (ibid.: 428). This kind of medievalist reservoir of possibilities is also characteristic of Fantasy film, which is likewise concerned with the intensification of feelings, shifts in perception, and imaginary but collectively identifiable images. I would like to suggest that these aesthetic processes follow the principle of mythical thinking, as conceived by Ernst Cassirer.

2. Mythical Thinking

Myths are a popular topic and always have been. In the last forty years, research on myths within medieval studies has undergone a shift; the focus is no longer on examining the history of the myths themselves, but more on understanding their narratological and poetological workings against the background of discursive phenomena. Gerhart von Graevenitz initiated this change of course in his mythological study of 1987, highlighting »traditions of thought« that are based on the myth in its distinctive character as a fiction and illusion, and arguing that it was time to move away from a »realism of the myth« (von Graevenitz 1987).[8] Viewed from this perspective, myths are discursive phenomena, as Bent Gebert suggests in his study on the Trojan War (Gebert 2013). The reception of the Middle Ages is a multilayered »post-production« (Groebner) of history, in which »traditions of thought« (von Graevenitz) are based on imagined but quite consistent pictorial processes. To find the analytical tools to deal with this complex phenomenon, I will draw on Cassirer's idea of mythical thinking. The reception of the Middle Ages, I suggest, functions on the basis of a particular perspective on the world and on history which can be described as mythical thinking.

The term »mythical thinking« derives from Ernst Cassirer's work on the philosophy of symbolic forms (1925). He argues that, in the mythical »understanding and explanation of the world«, spaces are charged with metaphysical meaning: »Each particular spatial determination thus obtains a definite divine or demonic, friendly or hostile, holy or unholy 'character'« (Cassirer 1955: 98). Borders in the mythical space mean symbolic demarcation (ibid: 99f.); they are a type of threshold which can only

8 Von Graevenitz argued that mythological studies should not be focusing on the question of essence (what the myth »really« is), as this leads to a »realism of the myth«. Any reference to reality should be kept at a distance. Myth is, instead, a fiction or an illusion. It is no longer bound to any »thing« (von Graevenitz 1987: VII-IX). Scholars, according to von Graevenitz, should trace »traditions of thought« and explore how today's »habits of thought« are linked with the mythical (ibid.: X-XII).

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be overcome in a specific manner, e.g. one fixed by rituals (ibid.: 104). In addition to this spatial definition, Cassirer also discusses temporal aspects of the mythical world:

> By being thrust back into temporal distance, by being situated in the depths of the past, a particular content is not only established as sacred, as mythically and religiously significant, but also justified as such. Time is the first original form of this spiritual justification. (ibid.: 105)

For Cassirer, there is no objectifiable time in the mythical consciousness. Instead, time plays out without differentiation in this prehistorical world; Cassirer speaks of a »timeless consciousness« (ibid.: 106). Here time is correlated with a certain emotional dynamic, i.e. with an intensity of present, past and future to which the subject is exposed (ibid.: 119).

So how are mythical dimensions expressed in the stories in which they occur? Like Tolkien in his novels, *Game of Thrones* uses tropes from medieval literature and extends them into fantastical dimensions. It is no secret that George R.R. Martin takes his inspiration from both medieval and present-day historiography of the Middle Ages.[9] He also makes use of various myths from medieval literature – such as myths of dragons as terrifying creatures from another world.[10] Mythical elements may include vague indications of time and space, or objects and characters. Fairy tales, for example, operate in mythical dimensions to create tension in what Tolkien calls »Perilous Realms«.[11] Because mythical worlds are not structured according to any clear temporal or spatial order, they can only be safely navigated by mythical creatures who are part of the respective world. These creatures possess supernatural powers, though in the terms of the internal mythical world these powers are natural. Stories that play out in a Fantasy world utilize their own mythical sub-worlds, or in Tolkien's term, »secondary worlds«. In *The Hobbit*, for example, when Bilbo Baggins sets out on his unexpected journey, he encounters magic and strange creatures he has previously only known from hearsay and not believed in – and thus discovers that the myths of his world really do exist.[12] In *Game of Thrones*, the White Walkers are part of a mythical sub-world. Their past and present remain a mystery, nobody knows where they come from and what their intentions are, yet they still

9 Numerous publications have examined the medieval inspiration for the world of *Game of Thrones*; to name just a few: Larrington 2015; Pavlac 2017; West 2019.

10 Tolkien writes about the fascination of fantasy creatures which make up an »Other-world«, and admits that he »desired dragons with a profound desire« (Tolkien ^{2}1988: 40).

11 The »Perilous Realm«, conceived as a kind of country, is another term from Tolkien: »Most good 'fairy-stories' are about *adventures* [emphasis in original] of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches« (Tolkien ^{2}1988: 14).

12 For secondary worlds see Tolkien ^{2}1988: 18 and 36.

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create an apocalyptic atmosphere. The sub-world of Valyria functions in a similar way. Defined historically rather than geographically, Valyria is a buried landscape in which zombie-like creatures inhabit the ruins of a former great power. Hybrid worlds are formed when border-crossing figures cause the mythical sub-world to break through into the 'normal' world. Encounters with the mythical world challenge the story's protagonists and drive the plot forward.

Many medieval narratives, as well as creative forms of medieval reception, are based on mythical thinking. Despite possible objections to using Cassirer's philosophy to explore medieval texts,[13] the spatiotemporal aspects of mythical thinking prove useful for the study of both medieval literature and Fantasy films. In both genres, remote spaces and times are used to construct worlds that oscillate between the really possible and the fantastic, the imaginable and the supernatural, thus allowing complex plots.[14] In hybrid narrative worlds based on mythical thinking, myth is not the opposite of reason;[15] rather, these narrative worlds presuppose a dialectic idea of myth like the one envisioned by Hans Blumenberg. Mythical elements are used to reinforce or explain supposedly historical events. It could be said that the myth serves to tame and channel reality and to control the unspeakable (Blumenberg 1971). The purpose of myth is not to frighten but to explain, or, in Blumenberg's words, to pro-

13 The theory was developed in the context of a history of ideas, and not with medieval literature in mind. Kiening questions Cassirer's dichotomies and criticizes the implications for epistemology and evolutionary history (Kiening 2004: 36).

14 Despite this, the Middle Ages as a whole epoch cannot be described as mythical itself, however constructed it may be. In his subchapter 'Playing (with) the Legend', Haydock briefly (and without reference) mentions André Bazin's view that »every new development [in cinema technology] must, paradoxically, take it nearer and nearer to its origins« (Haydock 2008: 182). He goes on to quote Robert Burgoyne: »Although Bazin probably meant that cinema would eventually arrive at a perfect replication of the real, computer generated imagery in fact pushes the origins of cinema back beyond the nineteenth-and twentieth-century dream of the mechanical or electronic reproduction of reality, all the way to premodernity, to medieval or mythic times when the line between fantasy, fact and speculation was not yet clearly drawn« (Burgoyne 2003: 234). Haydock does not comment on the implicit assumption that there were no boundaries between fantasy, fact, and speculation in the Middle Ages,. Instead, in his discussion of films that he refers to as »post-medieval« (here he is talking about films that subvert the principle of Enlightenment and the break with the Middle Ages and reveal a still-active, Manichean, medieval worldview), he adopts Burgoyne's idea of a medieval age which is also a mythical age: »Let us begin with Burgoyne's notion […] of technologies of the virtual that blur the distinction between fantasy and reality to a degree thought to be characteristic of 'medieval or mythic times'« (Haydock 2008: 187).

15 Udo Friedrich and Bruno Quast, for example, describe the myth as »the Other of reason« (Friedrich/Quast 2004b: X).

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duce »distance from the quality of uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*)«.[16] If the myth is to be instrumentalized in this way, it must be contended that »What matters is not that the written history is true, but that it has to be true« (Blumenberg 1985: 125).

This raises the question of authenticity, which always accompanies images of the Middle Ages. The idea of the medieval period as a singular epoch is in itself mythological. Groebner describes this as follows: »Speaking and writing about the Middle Ages means negotiating wishes. This epoch […] was literally created by wishes, many hundreds of years ago, and since then it has been designed, outlined, equipped and furnished with wishes. Quite a variety of wishes« (Groebner 2008: 11f.). The »powerful fantasies of the Middle Ages, which were used to create tangible realities in the sixteenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries« (ibid.: 23), still determine the popular reception of the Middle Ages today. This now includes the Fantasy worlds of films, as well as computer games and reenactment events (ibid.: 143f.). From the beginning, the tourist gaze at the supposedly European Middle Ages (ibid.: 143) as the Other has been a »combination of the picturesque and the barbaric' (ibid.: 124f.). What Eco calls 'dreamed alterity« becomes »tourist fantasies« in Groebner's work (ibid.: 144): »Clearly this is about the semiotic character of a Middle Ages that, beyond the authentic, views itself very self-confidently as the reenactment of a new, reconstructed commercial counter-world« (ibid.: 142). But how is this semiotic character expressed, and what indexing system is concealed behind it? Here I would like to suggest that there is an aesthetic of the mythical, which performs precisely this indexing function.

3. The Aesthetic of the Mythical

The concept of aesthetics has different emphases in different research disciplines. The focus on art-related beauty is a relatively modern association and is not central here. Etymologically, aesthetics (from the Ancient Greek αἴσθησις/*aísthēsis*) is about perception and sensation, about humans' sensory and – in the broadest sense – cognitive understanding.[17] Following this basic epistemic meaning, I understand aesthetic processes as symbolic processes (cf. Goodman 1968). Mythical thinking as a symbolic form (as defined by Cassirer) shares this semiotic character of aesthetics, as expounded by Nelson Goodman. When mythical thinking is illustrated in literature and film, when the symbol is embodied in the image, then it becomes possible to

16 »Both phenomena, that of the elimination of monsters from the world and that of the transitional forms on the way to the human *eidos*, must have to do with myth's function of producing distance from the quality of uncanniness« (Blumenberg 1985: 117).

17 For a comprehensive overview of the concept of aesthetics in medieval literary studies, see Kobiela 2022: 7–37.

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perceive the imaginary. The images of the Middle Ages, repeatable with variations, form an index; this in turn fundamentally influences the popular conception of the Middle Ages.

The functioning of mythical modes of narration, such as those we encounter in *Game of Thrones*, is closely linked with medievalist stereotypes. Among those, there are two I would like to explore. Two striking thematic complexes, femininity in conjunction with bestiality on the one hand and Orientalism on the other, are of structural importance in *Game of Thrones* and constitute core elements in two bestsellers of the high and late Middle Ages: the stories of *Mélusine* and *Herzog Ernst*. The mythical dimensions outlined below relate to ideas of time and space and to the hybridity of the characters involved.

The timelessness of mythical thinking finds expression in the stylistic device of pastiche,[18] defined by art historians as a superimposition of different epochs. In the Fantasy genre, pastiche (or bricolage, Velten 2018, 20) is part of an aesthetic of the mythical. The visual world of *Game of Thrones* combines visual concepts from antiquity with those from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, as well as elements from Science Fiction. This causes a collision between the three levels of time mentioned by Cassirer (past – present – future), creating »a sort of historical deep sea« which is perceived as a mythical past (see Groebner 2013: 412 and 421–423). The superposition of a fantasy 'once upon a time' and an apocalyptic 'soon' relies on visual presentation. This type of production of affective images also occurs in literature, however (see ibid.: 411 and 424). One example is the legend of Mélusine, which is French in origin but was rewritten and translated multiple times.[19] The most canonical version was compiled around 1393 by Jean d'Arras and served the real historical interests of his patron, John, Duke of Berry.[20] The fusion of history and mythical world, the motif of the dragon in the context of genealogical myths, and the combination of femininity and animality are elements of *Mélusine* that also appear in *Game of Thrones*, more specifically in relation to the character Daenerys Targaryen.

Daenerys is the paternal aunt of Jon Snow, her confidant and lover. As the youngest child of King Aerys II Targaryen, who had to flee the kingdom after the rebellion of Robert Baratheon, Daenerys lays claim to the Iron Throne and upholds this claim to her dying breath. She is the mother of dragons, has a family bond

18 For this technique for representing the past in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries see Nagel/Wood 2010. See also Groebner: »The past was able to be literally reactivated by means of substitution and technical reproduction of the authentic«; pastiche is the »conscious recombination of different elements of different styles or of new content in the old style from different sources: imitation as recombination to maximize the effect« (Groebner 2013: 426).

19 For an examination of the mythical dimension of the German version (written by Thüring von Ringoltingen in the mid-fifteenth century) see Quast 2004; see also Kiening 2005.

20 For a detailed account of this and the mythical legitimization of claims to sovereignty, see my article in *Bohemia* 61 (2021).

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with these mythical beings, and is immune to fire. In short, she is no ordinary mortal and possesses mythical abilities which give her anatomical kinship to these creatures. Within the world of *Game of Thrones*, her origin can be seen as mythical. Daenerys's family originally came from Valyria, an inaccessible kingdom told of in songs and legends. The characters of Westeros sing about it as a lost world.[21] Daenerys learns how to derive political benefit from her origins by inspiring both fear and admiration and using her mythical background to consolidate her claim to power.

Mythical origins also have consequences for the plot in the case of the literary character Mélusine. In the earliest surviving textual witnesses, the protagonist Mélusine is a kind of demon; in later courtly romances she becomes the ancestor of many noble families.[22] In the version by Jean d'Arras, Mélusine's origin remains concealed from most of the characters. The readers, however, learn about the previous history of her parents and about the curse put on Mélusine by her mother, a fairy, as punishment for imprisoning her father in a mountain. They are therefore aware of her non-human origins and the animal side of her life: every Saturday, Mélusine turns into a serpent-like creature from the waist down.[23] She is able to keep her secret fairly successfully and to help her husband Raymondin to achieve prosperity and a good reputation. At the same time, she triumphs as a strong, intelligent, and generous ruler. A beautiful woman (as the narrator assures us), Mélusine cloaks herself in secrecy; the source of her knowledge and her wealth is inexplicable for the characters around her. In general, she succeeds in coping with the demonic spell that partially transforms her into a snake every Saturday. Yet it is manifested in the disfigurement of nearly all her children: the faces of eight out of her ten sons have visible anomalies.

What d'Arras tells us about Mélusine's prior history is that her mother, Presine, left her husband, Elinas, king of Scotland, taking her triplet daughters, after he broke his promise not to see her during or after the birth. She fled to Avalon, also known as 'the lost island', which cannot be found by anyone except by chance:

21 Most vividly depicted in the episode when Tyrion and Jorah travel to Valyria (see season 5, episode 5).

22 For an overview of the history of the text, including the sources that Jean d'Arras used for his version, see Vincensini 2003: 8–31.

23 For the visual proximity to medieval ideas of the Fall, in which Eve and Satan look extremely similar, see my article in *Bohemia*.

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> L'ystoire nous dit que quant Presine party de Elinas atout ses trois filles qu'elle s'en ala atout elles an Avalon, nommé l'Ille Perdue, pour ce que nulz homs, tant y eust esté de foiz, n'y sauroit rassegner fors par aventure. (Jean d'Arras 2003: 130).[24]
>
> The story tells us that when Presine left him she took her three daughters to Avalon, which was called the Lost Isle because no man, however many times he had been there before, could ever find it again except by chance. (Jean d'Arras 2012: 24)

This place where Mélusine grows up is hidden from most people and is a mythical site within the story. When Mélusine learns the truth about her father, she condemns him for his betrayal of her mother and buries him alive in a mountain. Presine, in turn, punishes Mélusine and her sisters, who were also involved in the deed. Mélusine will now turn into a half-woman/half-serpent every Saturday, until she marries a man who loves her and accepts her secret. Only then will she gradually become a mortal woman.

Both Daenerys and Mélusine, as mythical hybrid figures, are ultimately rejected by the person closest to them: Jon Snow stabs Daenerys to death, Raymondin betrays Mélusine. In both cases there is a link between femininity and animality, and the women rulers' supernatural powers envelop them in a mythical atmosphere. Nobody knows where they really come from or where they obtain their charismatic power from. The characters around them oscillate between admiration and contempt for them. The mythical source of their powers and abilities does not fit into the polar categories of good and evil, real or imagined.

A large part of the *Mélusine* romance is devoted to the story of the sons, who make a name for themselves as crusaders. In fact, for a time the kingdoms of Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Armenia were ruled by sons of the historical house of Lusignan, which laid claim to the mythical ancestress Mélusine. The 'Orient' features heavily in medieval literature.

However, in the literature of the Middle Ages, as in the modern Fantasy film, we encounter a mythical Orient. Mythical worlds do not necessarily have to be remote and far-flung fairy worlds; the region once generally referred to as the Orient was often subject to a mystification that was tantamount to mythical treatment.[25]

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24 The edition by Vincensini is not based solely on the oldest surviving manuscript in Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, but also takes into account further text variants from other manuscripts, in contrast to the older edition by Stouff in 1932.

25 Mechanisms of othering, used to distinguish between demons and humans, also served to defame non-Christians, i.e. Jews and Muslims, in medieval stories and artworks with an Orientalist undertone. The connections between othering and representations of Jews and Muslims in medieval culture are well known. See e.g. the following studies: Cohen 2004; Strickland 2003; Rubin 2014; Akbari 2009, Burge 2016.

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The medieval tale *Herzog Ernst*, a heroic epic with elements of crusader literature, illustrates the role of mythical dimensions in the process of othering.[26] Although the contested, colonialist concept of the Orient was not invented until much later, even in the Middle Ages there were discourses that presented 'the East' as foreign or other. Indeed, Geraldine Heng sees racist ideas as originating in the Middle Ages (Heng 2018).[27]

When it comes to exoticized images of the 'Orient', we do not have to rummage around in the Middle Ages to find examples. Vividly coloured scenes from *Game of Thrones* play with stereotypes rooted in an Orientalist perspective, e.g. when crowds of dark-skinned people worship their white saviour, Daenerys (season 3, episode 10). Further Orientalist aspects are reflected in the dialects of the characters. We can tell whether characters come from Westeros, the equivalent of the West, or Essos, the equivalent of the East, not only from their clothing but also from their pronunciation: characters from Westeros speak English with a British accent, while those from Essos speak poor English with a strong accent.[28] Moreover, there are cinematographic elements that refer visually to the Orientalist art of the nineteenth century, that is, Romantic art by Europeans in which the 'Orient' is imagined and often exoticized. There is an astounding similarity between the depiction of Jamie Lannister's visit to Dorne (season 5, episode 9), the eastern tip of Westeros, and Romantic paintings of the Orient such as *The Harem Dance* by Giulio Rosati (1858–1917).[29] Yet this similarity should not surprise us, since clichés about the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim rule served loosely as inspiration for Dorne. An HBO featurette on the shooting of these scenes in the Alcázar of Seville shows how the Andalusian architecture and garden landscapes were intensified, e.g. in terms of colour, to make Dorne appear more real (cf. Youtube 2015, online). The featurette leaves no doubt as to the aim here: to superimpose the world of *Game of Thrones* on a supposedly real Middle Ages which can be found in our world. The Middle Ages of tourism meets the Middle Ages of Fantasy. It does not matter that the colourful tiles we see in the episode, the Renaissance gates into the garden and other individual elements cannot have come from the medieval period and must have arrived much later. In the spirit of pastiche, this blending of styles is part of the aesthetic of the mythical. The strategy of the medieval setting is also used, for example, in the CGI-enhanced images of Dubrovnik as King's Landing. The anachronistic side-by-side of different styles flattens differ-

26 For a detailed study of the mythical dimensions in *Herzog Ernst*, see my article in *Bohemia*.

27 See also Sivri 2016; he translates *othering* as »sociocultural stigmatization« (ibid.: 29).

28 The postcolonial implications are obvious.

29 Rosati, The Harem Dance, Christie's auction on 20 June 2002, Sale 6562: '19th century European art including Ottomans & Orientalists', thumbnail reproduction at (Christie's 2002, online).

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entiation, it subsumes varying elements to merge into a kind of ahistorical »Utopian continuum« (Velten 2018: 17).

A fantastic and mythical Orient also takes up a large part of the story of *Herzog Ernst*, an anonymous twelfth-century crusade narrative.[30] This epic enjoyed continuing popularity into the seventeenth century, and after 1800 the Romantic enthusiasm for the Middle Ages rekindled the fascination with it.[31] The theme of authenticity is explicitly addressed in the surviving texts, highlighting an awareness of the ambivalent relationship between myth and history. Ultimately, however, it is the nature of the epic genre to claim that it recounts the truth. Hence this is not so much a serious attempt to convince readers; it is more about fulfilling the expectation that the epic will create a world in which myth and reality merge together – a strategy we also encounter in Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine*.[32]

The adventurous journey (or journey to the Orient, as scholars call it) leads the protagonist and his men into a mythical sub-world or other-world.[33] Access to this world is mysterious: after three days on the high seas, they are driven there by a storm; this is a place that cannot be reached deliberately.[34] The multilayered framing of the plot underlines this remoteness; the adventurous journey is located at the core of several frame narratives. The crusade to the Holy Land leads the men through uncertainty. In the end, guided by natives, they do reach Jerusalem; in other words, the geographical East *is* accessible from the mythical Orient. However, a second storm at sea is needed to lead Ernst and his men back home to the Holy Roman Empire. The foreign Orient of *Herzog Ernst* is full of mythical elements, including the navigation through this fantastical realm and the fabulous beings and hybrid creatures that populate it.[35] Ernst begins to build up a collection of specimens of the different creatures akin to a cabinet of curiosities:

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30 Several researchers have already pointed out intrinsically Orientalist elements of *Herzog Ernst*, see Stock 2017; Goerlitz 2009; Lazda-Cazers 2004; Sivri 2016.

31 There are many reasons for the popularity of this narrative material, such as the extraordinary adventures and the complex plot structure. As Carey puts it: »The fantastic and the monstrous, the potpourri of medieval and ancient legends of people and places on the outer edge of the known world, would seem to play the deciding role in the dynamic appeal and longevity of this story« (Carey 2004: 54).

32 The existence of hybrid beings such as snake women (as in *Mélusine*) or humans with the heads of cranes (as in *Herzog Ernst*) is also an element that creates a mythical world. See Blumenberg: »Myth represents a world of stories that localizes the hearer's standpoint in time in such a way that the fund of the monstrous and the unbearable recedes in relation to him. This includes the transitional forms between beast and man […]« (Blumenberg 1985: 117).

33 In a sense this is an aesthetic space, such as that described by Stefan Seeber for the island of the griffins in *Kudrun*, see Seeber 2008.

34 For the cartography of the »foreign« or »other«, see Kobiela 2022: 37–55.

35 The crane-billed people of Grippia are always defined by bodily characteristics. For a discussion of identity-defining physical features in *Herzog Ernst*, see Stein 1997.

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nu het der fürste lobesam
in sînem hove den Gîgant
und zwên von Perkamêren lant,
vil Ôren und manigen Plathuof.
der fürste in flîzeclîche schuof
swaz sie haben solden
und mêre dan sie wolden.
er hâte sie vür im durch wunder.
disiu seltsæniu kunder
verriben im vil dicke sît
mit kurzerwîle die lange zît.
(Sowinski 2009: 298, V. 5322–5332)

Besides the giant, there were now at the court the two men of Prechami and many Ears and Flat Hoofs, all of whom got whatever they wanted and more from their lord. He kept them with him as wonders, and in afteryears these strange beings often made long hours short and pleasant. (Thomas/Dussere 1980: 118)

The different creatures, including giants, tiny people (*Perkameren*), or people with long ears, are objectified as curiosities: they are defined by the gaze of the observer. To return to Cassirer, the missing representative level points to a lack of abstraction in mythical thinking.[36] In *Herzog Ernst* the strange creatures (»wunderlîch volc«, Sowinski 2009: 270, V. 4816) are to be taken at face value. Their physical qualities do not invite any non-figurative interpretation that would allow for a deeper underlying meaning. Their identification via the gaze of the observer is a fetishizing, Orientalist perspective, made possible by the mythical foundation of the wondrous Orient.

It would be a mistake to believe that the bizarre creatures of the mythical Orient, such as those that appear in the illustrated manuscripts about the famous travels of John de Mandeville, belong to a medieval literary past. In *The Lord of the Rings*, an army of monstrous creatures from the East is mobilized to fight on the side of evil. In *Game of Thrones*, Valyria is teeming with dangerous beings, and even the Dothraki, a nation of horseback warriors, are depicted as strange and bestial. As in *Herzog Ernst*, mythical spaces converge with the mythical Orient and its fantastical inhabitants – whether it be beyond Tolkien's »Edge of the Wild« or in the depths of Essos.

36 According to Cassirer, it is a decisive step in the analysis of the mythical world to take events and descriptions literally: »the 'image' does not represent the 'thing'; it is the thing, it does not merely stand for the object, but has the same actuality, so that it replaces the thing's immediate presence. Consequently, mythical thinking lacks the category of the 'ideal', and in order to apprehend pure signification it must transpose it into a material substance or being« (Cassirer 1955: 38).

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4. Conclusion

Our vision of the Middle Ages is influenced by medievalist images from Romanticism nineteenth-century historicism, as well as from the film versions of various Fantasy novels in the Tolkien tradition. In more recent times, *Game of Thrones* has arrived on the scene. What we are dealing with here are reproducible visual processes that create meaning and heighten emotion. This reproducibility of artificial images is a key to understanding that media plays an important part in the emergence and dissemination of dominant stereotypes. The medievalism of the Fantasy genre uses images of the Middle Ages that rely on the imaginary themselves. At the same time, in a reverse process of appropriation, fantasy influences the imaginary. Lacan loathed this tendency of the imaginary to blur the boundary between fantasy and perception.[37] There is no doubt, however, that this blurring exists and exerts an influence. Tolkien had issued a similar warning against the illustration of fairy stories (cf. Tolkien [2]1988). Appropriations are seldom free of moralizing judgments, and they can lead to phenomena of exclusion. This is inherent in every representation of history: »Time and history are always-already colonized and never an inert, innocent Otherness waiting to be excavated« (Cohen 2000b: 5). And it is all the more serious in the case of Fantasy, where there is no historicity in the background to provide orientation.

The aesthetic of the mythical gives the imaginary a face; it makes the fantastic visually perceptible. In the interplay between narration and reception, mythical elements appear on various levels. A story – and the *Game of Thrones* series fits broadly into this category – presents itself as a myth. Within it, ideas about the Middle Ages are mythologized – for example in the visual world of *Game of Thrones*. With repeated viewings, the image of the Middle Ages then gradually moves into a mythical past.

One connection that requires critical attention is the link between medievalism and Orientalism. In addition to the historical sources of inspiration, *Game of Thrones* uses enduring stereotypes, archetypes of the mythical repertoire. Popular stories in the Middle Ages may have functioned in a similar way, interweaving historical paradigms with fictional elements in creative narrative worlds. In Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine*, elements from history are displaced into a mythical world. In *Herzog Ernst*, existing spaces become entangled with the Orientalist appropriations of a mythical world. The aesthetic of the mythical, already given literary form in medieval narratives, undergoes a new phase of intensification in the cinematic use of medievalist stereotypes – since the technology can now lend uncanny realism to the on-screen reproduction of fantastic narrative worlds. And the more often medieval-

37 See Haydock: »For the penchant of the Imaginary to blur the distinction between fantasy and perception Lacan retained an abiding scorn« (Haydock 2008: 8).

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ist stereotypes are reproduced in mythical thinking, the more authentic they seem.[38] As Cassirer astutely observed, »Today it is openly asserted that no clear logical division can be made between myth and history and that all historical understanding is and must be permeated with mythical elements« (Cassirer 1955: XVII). Umberto Eco also reminds us: »So, before rejoicing or grieving over a return of the Middle Ages, we have the moral and cultural duty of spelling out what kind of Middle Ages we are talking about« (Eco 1986: 72). Dealing with medievalist popular culture requires a critical approach, a *critical medievalism*,[39] which takes into account the aesthetic of the mythical in its indexing function and reproducibility.

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38 Cf. a similar argument in Groebner: »The past seems more authentic the more often it is reenacted« (Groebner 2018: 119).

39 See my call for »critical medievalism« in *Bohemia* 61 (2021).

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Reception of Medieval Literature in Science Fiction Series

Isabella Managò

In his well-known essay on the different ways of imagining the Middle Ages, Umberto Eco writes, »Dream of the Middle Ages, but always ask yourself what kind. And why.« (Eco 1988: 111–126, here 125)[1] While dreams themselves tend to fall into the realm of creative adaptation in literature, film and computer games, it falls more to scholarly inquiry to ask what kind of Middle Ages we are dealing with and why there is such an unabated fascination to this day. In the field of Science Fiction, both areas touch, though the natural sciences and technology are usually in the foreground. In the following, however, the focus will be on how Science Fiction approaches the field of medieval literary studies.

It is not only in classic Fantasy TV series such as *Game of Thrones* or *The Witcher*, which have become very popular in recent years, that we encounter an appropriation of medieval lifeworlds, but also in pop-cultural Science Fiction such as *Star Trek* or *Doctor Who*, where medieval heroes and heroines, settings, and motifs are taken up and visually brought to life. How this can be examined in medievalist research is still subject of discussion. For example, it is still being negotiated what sort of terminology best describes this form of relationship between medieval culture and modern media. So far, there is broad agreement that the German term *Mittelalterrezeption* is too generic on the one hand and falls short on the other, and that *medievalism* or *neomedievalism*, which come from the English-speaking world, are better suited to describe the peculiarity of the relationship, especially of Fantasy, to medieval texts (cf. Velten 2018: 13–16 and Münkler 2021: 438f.).

Although the genres of Fantasy and Science Fiction are closely related, there are some differences in the way they take up ›the Middle Ages‹. I would like to share a few thoughts on this below by way of an introduction. In his reflections on how to make Umberto Eco's term *new medievalism* applicable to modern Fantasy literature, Hans Rudolf Velten refers to a statement by Eco about wax museums in which he writes that by looking at the reproduction, visitors to wax figures do not desire the original,

1 All quotations from Eco here and below have been translated from the German edition.

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they do not even have a need for the original anymore.[2] While this analogy is easily understandable as far as the reproduction of the Middle Ages in Fantasy literature or films is concerned, it applies only to a limited extent to the treatment of the Middle Ages in Science Fiction. In the latter, for the most part, characters from an imagined future are transposed, either through time travel or through highly developed technology, right into a ›historical era‹ or literary work, thereby claiming authenticity and originality for what these characters experience in the past. Interestingly, however, as I will show, the characters in the series themselves can question the historicity of what they experience. This leads to an compelling intra-fictional debate about what distinguishes history from a story. Accordingly, Science Fiction is more strongly characterised than Fantasy by historicity or, at least, something that is declared as such, and by a certain claim to scientificity.[3] What makes it very similar to Fantasy, on the other hand, are the recurring narrative patterns and forms, such as the design of the prototypical hero. Also, the two genres resemble each other in their need to make the past audiovisually and aesthetically tangible. Umberto Eco has already made a qualitative distinction between the ways in which different genres such as Fantasy and Science Fiction take up the Middle Ages. Referring to the typical effect of Science Fiction on the treatment of historical material, he writes:

> […] even when science fiction turns into history fiction (and I remember a novel in which the hero, projected into the past, became Leonardo da Vinci), what is of interest about science fiction is not so much the modified history as the mechanics of its modification, that is, the cosmological possibility of the journey back, the »scientific« problem of a projection of possible history, starting from the tendencies of the current world (Eco 1988: 214–222, here 218).

At the same time, the perspectives on the Middle Ages in Science Fiction often oscillate, I think, between the »barbaric place« described by Eco, which he also sees as the Middle Ages of heroic Fantasy, and the »romantic Middle Ages«, which Eco describes as »full of love for the gloom of crumbling castles« and thus typical of the 19th century, but, as he writes, also of »*some modern space opera*« (Eco 1988: 111–126, here 120).

Although the two genres do overlap and the dividing lines between them are not entirely clear-cut, it seems to me that the most obvious difference is that Fantasy creates a new world based on the Middle Ages, whereas in Science Fiction it is more common for time travelers to travel to a historical or literary medieval world of some

2 Velten 2018: 16.

3 See Velten 2018: 16–17 on why this is much less the case in Fantasy. The claim to authenticity in Science Fiction does not, of course, imply that the medieval world staged in it is necessarily more authentic.

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kind that is strongly rooted in cultural memory in that it has already been dealt with so many times.[4]

In addition to the distinction of genres, there is also the distinction of medium to be considered, seeing that it makes a difference whether stories are retold in textual form between two book covers, or in moving images.[5] While in the first case, images are created more subjectively in the mind of the reader through the descriptions in the text, films and series convey a more direct visual-aesthetic experience and evoke »Momente des Spektakelhaften der Inszenierung, der Verlebendigung von statischen Bildern und des Eindringens in eine ferne, kulturell andersartige Zeit« (›Moments of spectacle in the presentation, the vitalisation of static images and the intrusion into a distant, culturally different time‹ Transl. I.M.) (Kiening 2006: 3–101, here 8f.). The screen can give the impression of a stronger claim to authenticity (the fourth wall is rarely broken in Fantasy and Science Fiction), but is of course – like any other medium – also subject to the distortions caused by contemporary perspectives and ideas.

In this article I will focus on episodes from Science Fiction series that not only deal with the Middle Ages in general, but also refer specifically to characters, themes and motifs from medieval literature. In these, too, as will be shown, medieval settings serve as vehicles for ideologies such as an exaggerated heroism, or as a contrastive foil to the technological and medical superiority of the present (and/or fictitious future).[6] In the following, however, I am more interested in two topics that

4 This does not necessarily have to be the Middle Ages on Earth, but can also be an era on other planets (in our universe or even in a multiverse) – in this case, Science Fiction approximates Fantasy, with an alien world being created within historical fiction; however, one that is not inhabited by elves or dwarves, but by aliens. There are always works in which this distinction is even less clear than it generally is. Mixed forms can be found, for example, in the genre of Fantastik, such as Harry Potter.

5 See also Mecklenburg/Sieber 2007: 95–136, who offer interesting reflections on the convergences of myth and dream in medieval films. On media theory in general, see Wandhoff 2007: 13–34.

6 Rather than giving individual examples at this point, I would like to draw attention to recurring motifs that – according to my, admittedly rather unsystematic, impression so far – are frequently used for this purpose. These include: persecutions of witches, the medieval social hierarchy (estates of the realm) as an instrument of oppression, cruel religious wars, or the plague in a society that was medically unarmed against such an epidemic, etc. Interestingly, these are mostly late medieval or early modern phenomena (ca. 15th/16th century), which are generalised into a long era of Middle Ages stretching roughly from the fall of the Western Roman Empire up to the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century. On the ›voracious Middle Ages‹, which neglect historical differentiations in favour of a utopian continuum and rather loose associations – both with history and with myths and legends –, see Velten 2018: 17.

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are popularly debated in the series: Firstly, I would like to consider how the respective episodes discuss the relationship between literature and historiography, which leads to a reflection on fictionality, thus making scholarly discourses approachable in contemporary pop culture. Furthermore, I am interested in how medieval figures, and especially heroes and heroines, are transformed into a contemporary television series and thereby redesigned as identification figures from a modern – and sometimes humorous – point of view. In fact, I think that we find similarities between the procedures used in the modern appropriation of medieval motifs and the methods used in the 'Medievalisation' of historical material, such as ancient myths and tales etc., in medieval texts and works of art. This can shed some light on a form of contemporary historical consciousness.

Three episodes from different series serve as examples for me, each of which takes up different (hi)stories. In chronological order of publication, these are: *Heroes and Demons* from *Star Trek Voyager*,[7] *Robot of Sherwood* from *Doctor Who*[8] and *Camelot/3000* from *DC's Legends of Tomorrow*.[9] In essence, I suggest that all three series discussed, as well as the genre in general, satisfy the pleasure of serial storytelling in a particular way. Regardless of the content, modern series also have characteristic in common with medieval storytelling.[10] This seems to me relevant as a preliminary remark, because despite ever-changing worldviews, we obviously, as Eco has observed, still enjoy the supposed novelty of a story, although what we enjoy is in fact the recurrence of a stable narrative pattern. In the stories, we want to find characters that have often been familiar to us from childhood, with their characteristic mannerisms, their typical ways of speaking and their repetitive techniques for solving recurring problems. In this sense, the series still satisfy our »need to find comfort in the (superficially marked) return of the same old thing« (Eco 1988: 155–180, here 160), which is only just new enough to be exciting. Serial storytelling, according to Eco, delights us not least because it seems to reward our prognostic abilities: »We are satisfied when we find what we had expected, but we attribute this ›finding‹ not to the structure [of the story] but to our acumen« (ibid.). Apparently, we share not only our enthusiasm for the same contents and characters with the Middle Ages, but also our delight in narrative repetition and, as will be shown, schematic characters. The enjoyment of reception oscillates, as Andrea Sieber states, between escapism and participation: either the moving images serve

7 S 1, E 11; executive producer: Rick Berman and Jeri Taylor; director: Les Landau; script: Naren Shankar; first broadcast: 24 April 1995.

8 12th Doctor, S 34, E 266; executive producer: Nikki Wilson; director: Paul Murphy; script: Mark Gatiss; first broadcast: 6 September 2014.

9 S 2, E 12; executive producer: Phil Klemmer; director: Antonio Negret, script: Anderson Mackenzie; first broadcast: 21 February 2017.

10 On the historicisation of serial narrative, see Kragl 2017: 176–197.

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as an escape from reality or it is precisely by the conscious process of »Hereinholen des Fiktionalen in die Wirklichkeit« (›bringing the fictional into reality‹ Transl. I.M.) that an identification with the characters and the story is established (Sieber 2017: 91–118, here 93).

1. Star Trek: Heroes and Demons

The starship *Voyager*, the first to fly under the command of a female captain, is the main setting of the fifth television series *Star Trek*. Produced in seven seasons between 1995 and 2001, it is about the journey of a crew stranded on the other side of the galaxy and making their way home through unknown territory.

In the episode under discussion, the crew encounters photonic life forms that, among other things, cause all security protocols on the holodeck to fail.[11] However, the story of *Beowulf* happens to be playing there, and the very failure of the security protocols imbues the story with a certain seriousness and, thus, reality: what has begun as a fictional leisure programme turns into a ›real‹ adventure in which life and death are at stake. As it turns out in the course of the episode, the alien life form occupies the role of Grendel in the story, making crew members disappear. The only one able to expose himself to the conflict or establish a first contact without danger is the equally holographic medical emergency programme, the doctor of *Voyager*. With the help of the warrior Freya, he finally manages to solve the misunderstanding with the alien life form and thus free the Danish King Heorot's halls from Grendel.

The very beginning of the episode features an interesting conversation between two crew members. After Ensign Harry Kim, who started the simulation in his spare time, disappears without a trace, First Officer Chakotay and Chief of Security Tuvok go in search of him. In the process, the two talk about the cultural background of the ongoing simulation:

> Tuvok: Beowulf?
> Chakotay: An ancient English epic set in sixth-century Denmark, if I remember correctly. It's about a hero named Beowulf, who fights a creature that's terrorizing a kingdom and murdering its subjects. Monsters and swordplay – that sort of thing. […]
> Tuvok: This ancient earth culture seems fascinated with monsters.

11 A holodeck is a (fictitious) holographic environment simulator in which any kind of world or even virtual persons can be created by programming, with self-learning artificial intelligence making ›human‹ interaction possible (holograms can even be fully-fledged crew members such as the Voyager doctor). The worlds created can be multiple times larger than the holodeck itself and the simulations appear so perfect that they are nearly indistinguishable from reality. Safety protocols usually ensure that people cannot be injured or killed.

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> Chakotay: Every culture has its demons. They embody the darkest emotions of its people. Giving them physical form in heroic literature is a way of exploring those feelings.
> (Min. 04:50–11:15)

What makes this passage interesting is the anthropological and psychological interpretation put forward by Chakotay, who thereby emphasises the fictionality of the narrative and ascribes a certain cultural meaning to it. He does this not only with the authority of a Starfleet officer who has had sociological and archaeological training, but also in his role as a Native American descendant to whom, among other things, a special approach to spirituality and genuine interest in cultural history are attributed. Both characters take a scientific angle; Tuvok asks intelligent questions from a cultural research point of view, and Chakotay, due to his expertise, is able to answer them competently.

In addition to these observations on the literary function of the monster as the hero's antagonist, the story also reflects on the prototypical hero or heroine. The very basic structures of the heroic narrative pattern seem to be sufficient to evoke memories of old heroic figures. However, not anyone can be a hero; rather, specific traits and behaviours are required to mark a character in the heroic narrative as ›heroic‹ and distinguish it from other agents, such as the old king or his envious, cowardly henchman.[12] In the case of the Doctor, this includes his superhuman abilities, which enable him to adapt to his environment and dematerialise himself in an emergency. In the case of Freya, a character added to the story, it is her courage in the face of danger, her belief in the true saviour and willingness to die for him, and her extraordinary skill with weapons. This continuous safeguarding of the hero's or heroine's superiority, marking it by intelligible signs like physical exorbitance or assigned items such as swords and armour, can be found equally in the mirrors for princes and chivalric romances of the Middle Ages; there, too, they are essential to the heroic narrative pattern (cf. Friedrich 2014: 175–194, here 182.). In this Science Fiction world, narrative patterns are adopted and the heroine's story is retold, but they are also transposed into modern times and, specifically, the Star Trek universe, which is characterised by humanistic ideas and ideals. Ultimately, the aim is not to defeat the enemy with brute force, but to try to understand his alien nature to resolve any conflicts of interest through diplomacy, if possible. The characters from the holodeck story, like Freya, remain true to the old heroic pattern, while the Star Trek characters create a diverging heroic image: for example, at the evening feast with the Danish heroes in the King's halls, the Doctor boasts about how many lives he has saved with his medical skills, which initially meets with astonishment and incomprehension from his audience, who had expected stories of battles with dragons

12 See also Holtzhauer/Vetter 2018: 226.

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or similar. The viewer, on the other hand, is reminded or taught – tongue in cheek – that they have outgrown this form of ›barbaric‹ heroism and that other ideals have come to count.

2. Doctor Who: Robot of Sherwood

Let us turn to another Science Fiction series that draws on a different literary source: the BBC series *Doctor Who*. This series has been produced by the BBC since 1963 and tells the story of an alien time traveler known only as *The Doctor*. Like all Time Lords, he has the ability to ›regenerate‹ when mortally wounded. The process is limited, however, and also involves temporary disruptions such as confusion or memory loss. In addition, his appearance and character sometimes change significantly in the process, and even a change of gender is possible. He travels with his various and varying companions in a space/time machine called TARDIS (*Time And Relative Dimensions In Space*), which is disguised as an old-fashioned police box, and becomes involved in adventures at different times, on different planets – with Earth being particularly popular.[13]

The Doctor does not travel very often, but he does travel to the Middle Ages. For this article, I have chosen the last episode (from 2014), which is, incidentally, the one most clearly inspired by literary sources.[14] My focus will be on the metafictional considerations that are made in the series, on the one hand by reflections on what

13 The series, which is known and beloved worldwide, has been broadcast in Germany since the 1970s. From 2014 to 2017, it won the German Curt Siodmak Award for Best Science Fiction Series four times running and is considered the longest-running and most successful Science Fiction TV series to date.

14 Robin Hood rewritings and retellings are extraordinarily widespread to this day. On that topic in general, see e.g. Potter/Calhoun 2008; on film and television, among others, Fichtner 2011: 129–144 and Ernst 2011: 145–158.

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constitutes a true hero, and on the other hand by the use of imagery and specific visual aesthetics.[15]

Like most episodes, this one begins in the TARDIS, and the Doctor and Clara, his current companion, discuss where to travel next. For once, the Doctor wants to leave the decision to Clara, asking her where in time and space she has always wanted to go. This results in a conversation about the possibilities and restrictions of travelling in a space/time machine:

> Clara: Well, there is something, someone that I've always wanted to meet. But I know what you'll say.
> Doctor: Try me.
> Clara: You'll say he's made up, that there is no such thing.
> Doctor: Go on.
> Clara: It's… it's Robin Hood.
> Doctor: Robin Hood.
> Clara: Yeah. I love that story. I've always loved it, ever since I was little.
> Doctor: Robin Hood, the heroic outlaw, who robs from the rich and gives to the poor. He's made up. There's no such thing.
> Clara: Ah, you see?
> Doctor: Old-fashioned heroes only exist in old-fashioned storybooks, Clara.
> Clara: And what about you?
> Doctor: Me?
> Clara: Yeah, you. You stop bad things happening every minute of every day, that sounds pretty heroic to me.
> Doctor: Just passing the time. […]
> Clara: Doctor! My choice. Robin Hood. Show me.

15 One aspect that I have not considered here but would at least like to mention, given its conspicuousness, is the use of humour, with which Usha Vishnuvajjala deals in her essay on this very episode (2020: 201–215). Among other things, she states that this plays an important role in defusing the tension between feeling attached to the supposedly historical figures and at the same time sceptical towards them. Thus, the laughter in this specific episode is mostly levelled against the Doctor's insistence on his rationality and his distrust of Robin Hood. The laughs from the audience, too, would mainly be in reaction to the incompatibility between the Doctor's beliefs and the visible ›evidence‹ presented to him. What makes it funny, according to Vishnuvajjala, is the fact that, for once, the audience knows better than the Doctor. At the same time, humour challenges the idea of the ›Dark Middle Ages‹ by presenting the various perspectives of the characters. The episode thus satirises the insistence on a classical fact-oriented historical periodisation and also serves as a counterbalance to preconceived ideas about the Middle Ages, showing that they can be romantic and disease-ridden, sunny and dangerous, real and imaginary all at the same time. The use of humour, Vishnuvajjala concludes, challenges false binaries and encourages a perspective that allows for both scepticism and belief in medieval fiction.

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Doctor: Very well. Earth. England. Sherwood Forest. 1190 AD-ish. But you'll only be disappointed.
(Min. 00:10–01:37)

So, the first thing to be discussed here is what the TARDIS can achieve at all, i.e., travel through space and time but not into fictional worlds. While Clara hopes to meet a hero of her childhood, the Doctor is convinced that Robin Hood did not ›really‹ exist but is merely a children's books hero. As early as at this point during the episode, Clara points out that heroism does not have to be an attribute of times past, but can be characterised by certain behaviours. This debate will be carried on throughout the episode.

The expectations of the Doctor, who steps out of the TARDIS saying, »No damsels in distress, no pretty castles, no such thing as Robin Hood« (min. 02:02–02:08), are immediately thwarted by an arrow and the figure of Robin Hood emerging from between the trees with his bow. Sherwood Forest presents itself as the perfect *locus amoenus*, and the »pretty castle« is not far away either. Bodium Castle, which was chosen for the setting, had already offered itself as a perfect model for the castle renaissance in the 18th and 19th centuries, which, as is well known, is rooted in the Romantic enthusiasm for ruins and the Middle Ages generally, which manifests itself especially in the landscape painting and literature of the time. This romantic perfection, however, is precisely what makes the Doctor sceptical in the first place:

Clara: Oh, I cannot believe this. You really are Robin Hood and his Merry Men.
Robin: Aye! That is an apt description. What say you, lads? […]
Doctor: Yeah… all very poetic. But it's very green hereabout, isn't it? Like I said, very sunny.
Clara: So?
Doctor: Have you been to Nottingham?
Clara: Climate change?
Doctor: It's 1190.
(Min. 11:22–11:31)

So, Clara and the doctor meet Robin's entourage; and while Clara is thrilled that everything appears exactly as in the stories she used to read as a teenager, the doctor remains unconvinced, taking blood and hair samples to prove that there is some sort of fraud involved – without success, however:

Clara: How can you be so sure he is not the real thing?
Doctor: Because he can't be.
Clara: When did you stop believing in everything?
Doctor: When did you start believing in impossible heroes?

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Clara: Don't you know?
(Min. 12:08–12:22)

In the course of the episode, the Doctor and Clara learn that Robin Hood's antagonist, the Sheriff of Nottingham, intends to use a crashed spaceship (disguised as part of a castle) and his robot knights to gain world domination. The sheriff and knights have been plundering the land to collect all the gold in order to fuel the spaceship. However, its engines are damaged and would cause an explosion that could destroy half of England. The adventurous attempt made by the Doctor, Clara and Robin Hood to prevent just such an explosion includes a bow and arrow contest, capture by the robot knights, and the discovery of the disguised spaceship.

On finding it, the Doctor and Robin Hood are confronted by the on-board computer, which has stored stories of Earth and its immediate environments and reveals information about Robin Hood.[16]

Doctor: At last. Something real. No more fairy tales.
Robin: What is this place?
Doctor: A spaceship. More twenty-ninth century than twelfth. […]
Doctor: Disguised itself as a twelfth-century castle. It merges into the culture, tries to keep a low profile, so no one notices. That explains the robot knights. But the engines. The engines are damaged. They're leaking radiation into the local atmosphere, creating a temporary climate of staggering benevolence.
Robin: I beg your pardon?
Doctor: I told you. It's too sunny. It's too green. And there is even an evil sheriff to oppress the locals. This explains everything, even you.
Robin: It does?
Doctor: Well, what does every oppressed peasant workforce need? The illusion of hope. Some silly story to get them through the day, lull them into docility, and keep them working. Ship's data banks. Full of every myth and legend you could hope for, including Robin Hood. Isn't it time you came clean with me? You're not real and you know it. Look at you. Perfect eyes, perfect teeth. Nobody has a jawline like that. You're as much a part of what is happening here as the Sheriff and his metal knights. You're a robot.
(Min. 29:18–31:03)

The images in the database seem to me worth a closer look, because they are intended to give an insight into what is known about Robin Hood, into his history. However, it is only superficially a chronological arrangement; in reality, the illustrations are chosen haphazardly, depicting Robin Hood with Marian, Robin Hood with

16 This information does not have to be expressly retrieved, but is immediately available and flickers repeatedly across the displays, like a screensaver.

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bow and arrow, and Robin Hood and his Merry Men. There are also an old book cover and an image from the first Robin Hood film – all from the 20th century. With one exception: a print of a 17th-century poem entitled *A True Tale of Robin Hood*.

What the spaceship's on-board computer makes available to the viewer is an eclectic mixture of fragmented images and scenes, the arrangement of which does not follow any recognisable criteria but only loosely accumulates Robin Hood stories, giving them an appearance of being chronologically connected. Completeness, both structurally and compositionally, is wanting; and with it, time or history itself loses its character as a referential factor and classification category. None of this is new, however; the motifs shown in the images have already come up in the series, but the references cannot be reconstructed or substantiated as specific sources. Instead, they represent unspecified motifs or narrative elements that can be assumed to be anchored in the viewers' cultural memory and around which, consequently, a Robin Hood retelling can revolve. However, the images in the database do not convey any real narrative plot, let alone an ending to the story. Despite, or actually because of, their loose association and above all the recognition they trigger, they nevertheless put forward a kind of claim to truthfulness to the characters as well as the viewers. For attentive viewers, this claim is additionally underlined by the ›historical‹ document which even bears *a true tale* in its name.

For the Doctor, on the other hand, the images in the database confirm his theory about Robin Hood, and eventually he even confronts the sheriff about it. During their conversation, however, it begins to dawn on him that his beliefs and his scepticism about Robin Hood do not fit in with the inherent logic of the story he has been drawn into. What unsettles him most is that from the sheriff's point of view, there would be no advantage in an antagonist, even if he does belong to a classic narrative scheme.[17]

After the Doctor, Clara and Robin Hood join forces to finally defeat the sheriff and prevent the destruction of the world, the Doctor and Robin have another conversation just before leaving:

> Robin: So, is it true, Doctor?
> Doctor: Is what true?
> Robin: That in the future I am forgotten as a real man? I am but a legend?
> Doctor: I'm afraid it is.
> Robin: Hmm. Good. History is a burden. Stories can make us fly.

17 »Sheriff: Robin Hood is not one of mine. – Doctor: Of course he is. He's a robot, created by your mechanical mates. – Sheriff: Why would they do that? – Doctor: To pacify the locals, give them false hope. He's the opiate of the masses. – Sheriff: Why would we create an enemy to fight us? What sense would that make? That would be a terrible idea. – Doctor: Yes! Yes, it would. Wouldn't it? Yes, that would be a rubbish idea. Why would you do that? But he can't be. He's not real. He's a legend!« (Min. 37:02–37:32.)

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> Doctor: I'm still having a little trouble believing yours, I'm afraid.
> Robin: Is it so hard to credit? That a man born into wealth and privilege should find the plight of the oppressed and weak too much to bear…
> Doctor: No.
> Robin: Until one night he is moved to steal a TARDIS? Fly among the stars, fighting the good fight. Clara told me your stories.
> Doctor: She should not have told you any of that.
> Robin: Well, once the story started, she could hardly stop herself. You are her hero, I think.
> Doctor: I'm not a hero.
> Robin: Well, neither am I. But if we both keep pretending to be, haha, maybe others will be heroes in our name. Perhaps we will both be stories. And may those stores never end.
> (Min. 42:53–44:09)

Besides developing an interesting definition of the hero as a role model for posterity, who becomes a hero actually through other people's imitation of him, the series also makes a reference to itself – and in its self-referentiality and self-reflexivity it reveals, in my opinion, a form of metafictionality or at least puts emphasis on its own fictional character.[18] By comparing himself to the Doctor and placing them both on the same level of heroism – something Clara has already hinted at from the beginning –, Robin Hood addresses not only the fact of his being invented and created, but also the Doctor's and thus, ultimately, that of the series itself.

The emphasis on the fictionality of the protagonists, coupled with a simultaneous confirmation of the historicity of Robin Hood – who does not seem to be a robot, after all –, reveals a general reflection on aesthetic illusions, which, following Werner Wolf, can be understood as a constant oscillation between distance (the consciousness of illusory nature and proximity (the willing engagement and playing along in the illusion) (Wolf 1993: 111–114). The disruption of illusion that metafictionality causes is by no means the end of aesthetic illusion in general – in which case the story of the hero of the series, the Doctor, would cease to make sense –; rather, the play with the different levels draws attention to the existence of different points of view, thus exposing the subjectivity of our experience and perception (cf. Pichler 2011: 86). In this way, the recipients can assume an explicit observer position and thus have a predetermined function, more so that in narratives that are pure illusion.[19]

18 On fictionality and ways of exhibiting it, cf. Jan-Dirk Müller 2004: 285f.

19 See also the Handbook on Fictionality, edited by Stierstorfer 2020, and especially the contributions by Schneider: 80–102 and Pichler: 268–296.

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3. Legends of Tomorrow: *Camelot/3000*[20]

DC's Legends of Tomorrow is a US Science Fiction television series about characters from the DC universe, which aired for seven seasons from 2016 to 2022. It is a spin-off to the series *Arrow* and *The Flash*, set in the same fictional universe.

The search for the *Spear of Destiny*, which must be protected because it has the power to change history and is therefore sought by various antagonists, leads the crew, who call themselves Legends rather than Heroes, in their time-travelling ship *Waverider* to Camelot, in the year 507 AD.[21] The crew's expectations are already negotiated in the run-up to their journey, informing the audience that knowledge, prejudices and assumptions about the destination epoch vary widely:

> Nate: Medieval England. See, this is what I'm talking about: a nice, well-documented piece of history.
> Ray: Knights in shining armour, damsels in distress, and best of all, jousts.
> Nate: Well, jousting didn't appear in England till 1300 AD.
> Ray: Don't take this away from me. Just forget about history for once, all right? We're in the Age of Legend.

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20 S 2, E12; executive producer: Phil Klemmer; director: Antonio Negret, script: Anderson Mackenzie; first broadcast: 21 February 2017. The title Camelot/3000 is a homage to the twelve-volume DC comic series of the same title, written by Mike W. Barr and illustrated by Brian Bolland between 1982 and 1985. The comic itself is also a retelling of the adventures of King Arthur, Merlin and the (in this case reincarnated) Knights of the Round Table, but follows a different plot than the TV series: In the comics, the Arthurian heroes find themselves in an overpopulated future world in the year 3000 AD, fighting off an alien invasion led by Arthur's old nemesis, Morgan Le Fay. In addition to the name and the revisited Arthurian theme, the TV series also draws issues raised in the comics, such as gender roles and same-sex love. In the comic series, for example, Sir Tristan is unexpectedly reborn as a woman, which forces him to reconsider his previous ideas of gender roles and sexuality as he still loves Isolde, also reincarnated as a woman. Although the two characters, Tristan and Isolde, do not appear in the Legends of Tomorrow episode, the topic is touched on by Sara and Guinevere. See Camelot/3000: DC Comics, limited series, December 1982–April 1985, 12 issues, written by Mike W. Barr; penciller: Brian Bolland; inkers: Bruce Patterson, Terry Austin; colourist: Tatjana Wood.

21 Presumably, this date was chosen because the British chronicles surviving from the early Middle Ages name King Arthur as the leader in the battles against the Angles, Jutes and Saxons, who invaded the country around 500 AD (the first mention of Arthur as King of the Britons, however, dates only from the 12th century, appearing in the Historia Regum Britanniae by Geoffrey of Monmouth). On the other hand, the depiction of characters, robes, weapons, etc. in the episode harks back to the high medieval period. Here, again, the concept of the »gefräßiges Mittelalters« (›voracious Middle Ages‹) comes into play, neglecting historical differentiations in favour of a utopian continuum and rather loose associations. On this subject, see Velten 2018: 17.

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> Nate: Well, remember what Santayana once said: »Those who cannot remember history are condemned to repeat it.«
> Ray: Was he a knight? I don't remember his name. And I was pretty obsessed with Arthurian lore as a kid.
> Nate: Hmm, well, if you were, you would know that there were no jousts.
> Ray: Oh… well… agree to disagree.
> (Min. 05:54–06:35)

Playing with the expectations of the superheroes, especially Ray's, is probably a reflection on those of the viewers who have read stories, watched films or even remember images from the Codex Manesse or similar: shining armour, noble ladies in distress and jousting tournaments. The fact that the crew historian, Nate, contradicts them and puts forward a supposedly ›correct‹ version of history is a recurring theme over the course of the episode, with expectations being thwarted and the fictionality of the narrative repeatedly highlighted. In the process, the question of the relationship between historical and literary narration and the connection between literature, myth and historiography, which has been frequently dealt with in literary and historical studies, is already raised and visualised here.

After the crew have dressed in accordance with the expected historical circumstances, they set off and first walk through a fairytale-like forest, with the historian once again taking the opportunity to lecture the others about the Middle Ages:

> Nate: Look, all I'm saying is, the stories you grew up on are just that. They're stories, alright? The Medieval world was a time of turmoil. It was the collapse of Rome, which led to the collapse of civilisation itself. And don't even get me started on health and sanitation.
> (Min. 07:35–07:46)

However, what has just been outlined is immediately negated by knights in shining armour, who have surrounded the group unnoticed. The leader of the group introduces herself as Guinevere and leads the crew to Camelot. At the sight of the magnificent hall and the Knights of the Round Table, Ray asks, »Still think, this is just a story?«, to which Nate reacts in amazement, but remains convinced: »This place shouldn't exist – there is a difference between history and legend.« (Min. 09.11–09:14.)

The discussion about this difference is central to the further conversations of the crew, though it is not a natural topic for Arthurian retellings in Science Fiction series. On the contrary, it is often crucial to the plot that the historicity of characters and artefacts is not questioned. This is the case, for instance, in an episode of *Stargate*, in which the crew are less in search of ideals and heroism than of tangible treasures; nor do they travel into the past but to another planet, where people live in a recreated

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Camelot. Their aim is to decide the impending war between the humans and the so-called Ori in their own favour by means of a mysterious weapon, the Holy Grail of the wizard Merlin, which, as legend has it, is to be found in this extraterrestrial Camelot. What is interesting about this episode is that at one point, Wolfram von Eschenbach is explicitly mentioned as a source:

> Mitchel: Wait a minute. We're talking about the Holy Grail, right? In every movie I've seen, that's a cup.
> Daniel: No, the notion that the Grail was a cup or chalice, particularly the one used by Christ at the last supper, was a late addition to the myth. You see in rare accounts it's described variously as a dish or platter or, in the case of von Eschenbach or other Middle East influenced chroniclers, as a ›stone that fell from the heavens‹.
> (Min. 32:12–32:30)

This comment is so remarkable for us because in Wolfram's *Parzival*, the Grail is described as follows:

> [*diu templeise*] *lebent von einem steine:*
> *des geslahte ist vil reine*
> *hât ir des niht erkennet,*
> *des wirt iuch hier genennet.*
> *er heizet lapsit exillis.*
> (Wolfram: Parzival 469, 2–6)

> They [the Knights Templar] gain vitality from a stone,
> that is extraordinarily pure.
> If you have not yet recognised it,
> it is announced to you here:
> it is called ›lapis exillis‹.
> (Transl. I.M.)

What exactly the phrase *lapsit exillis* is supposed to mean is not clear and is still being discussed in academia today. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, one interpretation that was put forward was to the effect that it was a spelling mistake and should actually read *lapis ex caelis* (›stone from heaven‹) (cf. Blöte 1904: 108). Even though it can be assumed that the average viewer cannot directly establish this link, the name Eschenbach is obviously used here as a credible source to make what is said sound historically plausible and deny other supposedly false theories – similar to the function of the poem *A True Tale* in the Robin Hood database. The idea of, or desire for, a unifying ›power‹ of scientific evidence is not without its dangers, seeing that every form of science is characterised by the illumination and discussion

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of as many facets as possible. As shown by this example, there are not always clear answers to all questions.

But let us return to the adventures of the so-called Legends. The initial expectations and prejudices of the time-travelling crew about the Middle Ages are repeatedly called into question during the episode. Thus, when they arrive in the past, there are neither »damsels in distress«, nor can they verify Nate's claim that the fall of Rome had put an end to all civilisation, seeing the vividly presented splendour of Camelot. In this way, not only the characters in the series, but also its viewers are subtly confronted with popular expectations that are not fulfilled. The impression given is that the time travellers have direct access to history, undistorted by books or other records of lore. The episode thus questions, among other things, what we can really know about history, seeing how, above all, what the crew historian expects and communicates to his colleagues in his expert role is contrasted by the in-situ experiences of the crew. In this context, the relationship between literature and historiography is repeatedly up for debate.

The appearance of Star Girl aka Merlin, who travelled to this century some time ago to hide a fragment of the Spear, and who shaped the place according to her idea of Camelot, explains a little of the perfection of the legend brought to life, but not its existence per se. On the contrary, the series reflects several times on the extent to which our expectations and even our ›maxims of action‹ are still influenced in adulthood by the stories we have grown up with in our cultural sphere. Later, for example, when a seemingly hopeless battle for the future of Camelot is imminent, Nate tries to stop his friend Ray from risking his life for the past, but the latter states:

> Camelot isn't about history. It's not even about some dusty old books that got a lonely kid through childhood.[22] It's about one noble idea – that we can all stand up for what's right, no matter what. I can't walk away from that.
> (Min. 27:40–27:55)

Here, the ideality of Arthurian chivalry is stylised into something worth fighting and, if necessary, even dying for in a distant future or the present day.

However, the courtly ideal is subject to transformations that make it eligible for transfer to modern times. Thus, for example, it is not Guinevere's abduction that triggers a crisis at court, as in the classical Arthurian novels, but King Arthur himself who is overpowered in a duel by one of his antagonists. Guinevere then takes her husband's place, after being coaxed into it by Sara, and thus seems to follow the destiny she had already explained to Sara at the beginning:

22 Exactly which stories are being referred to is not specified. However, it can be assumed that neither the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth nor of Chrétiens de Troyes are implied, but rather the adventures of Prince Valiant or something along those lines.

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Guinevere: I was a warrior, long before I was a queen.
Sara: Why does it sound like you preferred that?
Guinevere: Politics is not one of my passions. But Arthur is a true friend and ally, and I believe in his vision for a more just and peaceful kingdom.
Sara: From what I see, Camelot lives up to its reputation.
(Min. 11:59–12:16)

However, as King Arthur has been defeated, captured and deprived of his free will by future technology, Guinevere steps up to galvanise her followers into action in a moving speech. She succeeds in convincing not only her subjects but ultimately also the *Waverider* crew that the ideal of Camelot is worth fighting and, if necessary, dying for, which is why they go into battle together. In accordance with the classic heroic scheme, they end up victorious and help King Arthur and his court in Camelot regain their former splendour and greatness.[23]

The case of Merlin and Guinevere makes it particularly clear that the old stories need new heroes and heroines in order to be compatible with modernity. The Chrétien-style, idealised but ambivalent King Arthur remains ambivalent. But not because he – as we know him from the medieval Arthurian romances – is immobile or acts rashly, but because his partner is simply the better heroine, knight and tactician. In outline, however, the plot remains largely classical: there is a splendid feast at Arthur's court, which gets disrupted; it tells of the isolation of a knightly hero who finally figures out what is really worth fighting for; it ends with a victory over the antagonists; and the love stories are at least hinted at.[24]

The time travel paradox that history is past and done with, and therefore known to the future, but can at the same time be changed by time travellers, is not addressed in this episode – as is usually the case – by means of digital history records, but with the help of an old, illustrated manuscript that Nate consults, warning the rest of the crew about the potential dangers of the past. Among other things, he learns from

23 On battles in cinematic realisations of the Arthurian legend, see Hildebrand 2002: 101–110.

24 An interesting topic, which I will largely neglect here because it would require a separate study from an art-historical point of view, is that of the objects and artefacts shown, which, just as the well-known heroes, are likely to trigger recognition with the viewers. However, in doing so they create a loose mosaic similar to the effect on the story about Robin Hood, making our ideas of the Middle Ages materialise. Besides the Round Table, which is modelled, fairly faithfully, after the representation in the Great Hall at Winchester Castle (the castle's banqueting hall is shown repeatedly in the episode, but the Round Table receives special attention in the arrival scene of Sara and her crew: min. 11:44), Excalibur appears, too, with a part of the Spear of Destiny hidden in it. With the help of her superpowers, Amaya (not one of her male colleagues!) later pulls the sword out of the stone because she is convinced that she can protect the Spear of Destiny better than Merlin, aka Stargirl. In the depiction of such motifs and objects, especially in their aestheticisation on the TV screen, history appears particularly impressive and vivid.

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it that Sir Galahad, whose place Ray has taken, is to die. The scenes of the actors at the knighting ceremony and Ray's accolade are transformed into the illustrations of the manuscript in a blend-over: stories become sources of history. What Nate quotes at the beginning of the episode, »Remember what Santayana once said: ›Those who cannot remember history are condemned to repeat it‹« (min. 06:21), is verified by the plot of the episode, because by knowing what has happened, the Legends can change the history that has already happened for the better.

To give some room for minstrelsy, the flirtation between the time travellers' captain and Guinevere, already hinted at in the episode, culminates in a passionate kiss at the end, after Guinevere says, »I enjoyed meeting you, Sara Lance – a lot« (min. 38:37), and Ray winks at Sara before they leave: »Every good legend ends with a kiss« (min. 39:12). The allusion to the relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot is almost certainly reserved for an audience who is familiar with the mythological tradition. The comment on how legends are traditionally supposed to end, on the other hand, is sentential and refers to the more common knowledge that even young children can boast if they know a few fairy tales. The episode keeps oscillating between these two poles: on the one hand, targeted at the broad target audience, certain characters and narrative elements are trivialised, while on the other hand, there are repeated allusions to background knowledge, and more complex, almost academic questions are raised.

Like the other episodes presented above, the *Legends of Tomorrow* episode offers narrative plots that are rather loosely oriented towards older stories, which – although still meaningfully anchored and legitimised in their historical or literary framework – are nevertheless to be located in the realm of fiction in terms of both content and presentation. It is this tension between the claim to authenticity of a historical period in a fictional narrative that the episodes address and about which characters like Nate and the Doctor rack their brains. The reflection on the fictionality of the narrative plot itself, i.e., on the fact that heroes or heroines in such stories belong more to the realm of legends than they can shed light on »wie es eigentlich gewesen ist« (›how it actually was‹), does not mean a break with tradition, however; it establishes a direct link to the courtly narrative style that is characteristic of medieval literature.[25]

The narrative structure of the series, too, resembles that of the medieval Arthurian novel and bears witness to the synthesizing power of a narrative, »in dem alle Zufälle auf ein glückliches Ende hin ausgerichtet sind« (›in which all coincidences are orientated towards a happy ending‹ Transl. I.M.) (Friedrich 2014: 176), and the heroes or heroines and society are all reconciled in the end. The context in which the protagonists find themselves links back to mythical patterns that are not

25 See also Herweg 2016: 148, who notes a similar treatment of fictionality in historical narratives with regard to medieval verse chronicles.

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specifically taken up but are more or less loosely anchored in the cultural memory of the audience. Through the overarching structure of serial narration, the episode not only recalls certain well-known narratives – in the cases discussed, the story of Beowulf, the legend of Robin Hood and the Arthurian cycle – but also embeds them in broader horizons of meaning by means of the narrative patterns inherent in the series (ibid.). However, as the relationship between literature and history is repeatedly explored so prominently, and because the time travellers do not have the ability to travel in literature, but only to visit – at least one kind of – the historical past, the narratives invite us, I would argue, also to reconsider the image of history conveyed in the series.

Hans Werner Goetz has coined the term »praktisches Geschichtsinteresse« (›practical interest in history‹) for when it generally emerges trom the »Identifikation mit historischen Personen, Gemeinschaften, Gegenständen und vor allem Institutionen« (›Identification with historical persons, communities, objects and, above all, institutions‹ Transl. I.M.) (Goetz 2007: 63). In doing so, he writes with reference to the Middle Ages, the past (however ahistorically portrayed) serves as an ideal and as a benchmark for the present. This is particularly evident in chivalric romances, which, with their ›backwards‹ orientation towards Alexander the Great, Charlemagne or King Arthur, hold up a mirror of right behaviour and true (i.e., earlier) chivalry to the knights of their own time (ibid.: 72). The Middle Ages, with their historical consciousness, thus understand and justify themselves only in view of their past and history. According to Goetz, this orientation towards the past always remains rooted in the present, and historiography can never be impartial but constructs a past that pursues a very specific, contemporary interest. And so, he concludes: »Das mittelalterliche Geschichtsbewusstsein war ein gegenwartsorientiertes Vergangenheitsbewusstsein« (›Medieval historical awareness was a present-orientated awareness of the past‹ Transl. I.M.) (ibid.).

Goetz' observations can be applied to the three series discussed above: here, too, the alleged consideration of the past follows current needs. Our own ideals are historically embedded and thus rooted in a (supposed) tradition, which in turn is considered as legitimising the present. Above all, medieval heroes and heroines are used for this purpose, being redesigned from a modern point of view as identification figures whose moral code is exemplary and whose attitude is worthy of imitation. Remembering well-known heroic figures and their revival, the basic structures of the medieval heroic narrative pattern are taken up but transferred to modern times and sometimes even subject to metafictional reflections.

As I have shown in the above analysis, all three episodes clearly transpose medieval narrative elements into the present and offer a reflection on prevalent discourses in humanities or raise pertinent questions: Why are there tales about monsters? How schematic must or may a hero be? In what ways do literary and historical narratives differ?

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It was found that (cultural) scientific questions are certainly raised in the episodes discussed, such as the reflection on the heroic by implicitly discussing the behaviour of the characters or explicitly discussing in conversations what it is that characterises a figure as 'heroic'. Historical or literary figures such as Arthur or Freya often stick to an old, medieval heroic schema, while the characters in the series form a more modern heroic image. Viewers are thus reminded or instructed that they have outgrown this form of 'barbaric' heroism and that other, more modern ideals count.

Furthermore, it was possible to show how questions about the relationship between historical and literary narrative and the connection between literature, myth and historiography are raised and visualised. The display of the fictional character of the protagonists while at the same time confirming their historicity (as in Robin Hood in particular) reveals a general reflection on aesthetic illusions. Well-known names or figures from history or literary texts, as well as artefacts such as swords etc., are often used to lend historical plausibility to the story. In the episodes, this tension between the claim to authenticity of a historical time is exhibited in a fictional narrative, which raises questions in a pop-cultural way that also concern literature, art and cultural studies.

Finally, based on the discussions in the series about the relationship between literature, myth and historiography, we can gain insights into modern ideas of history and compare them to the medieval ones, noting that they are not as different as one might think. Last but not least, Science Fiction does not only illustrate scientific or technical discourses. Science Fiction can also address questions that belong in the realm of the humanities, as pop-cultural phenomena.

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