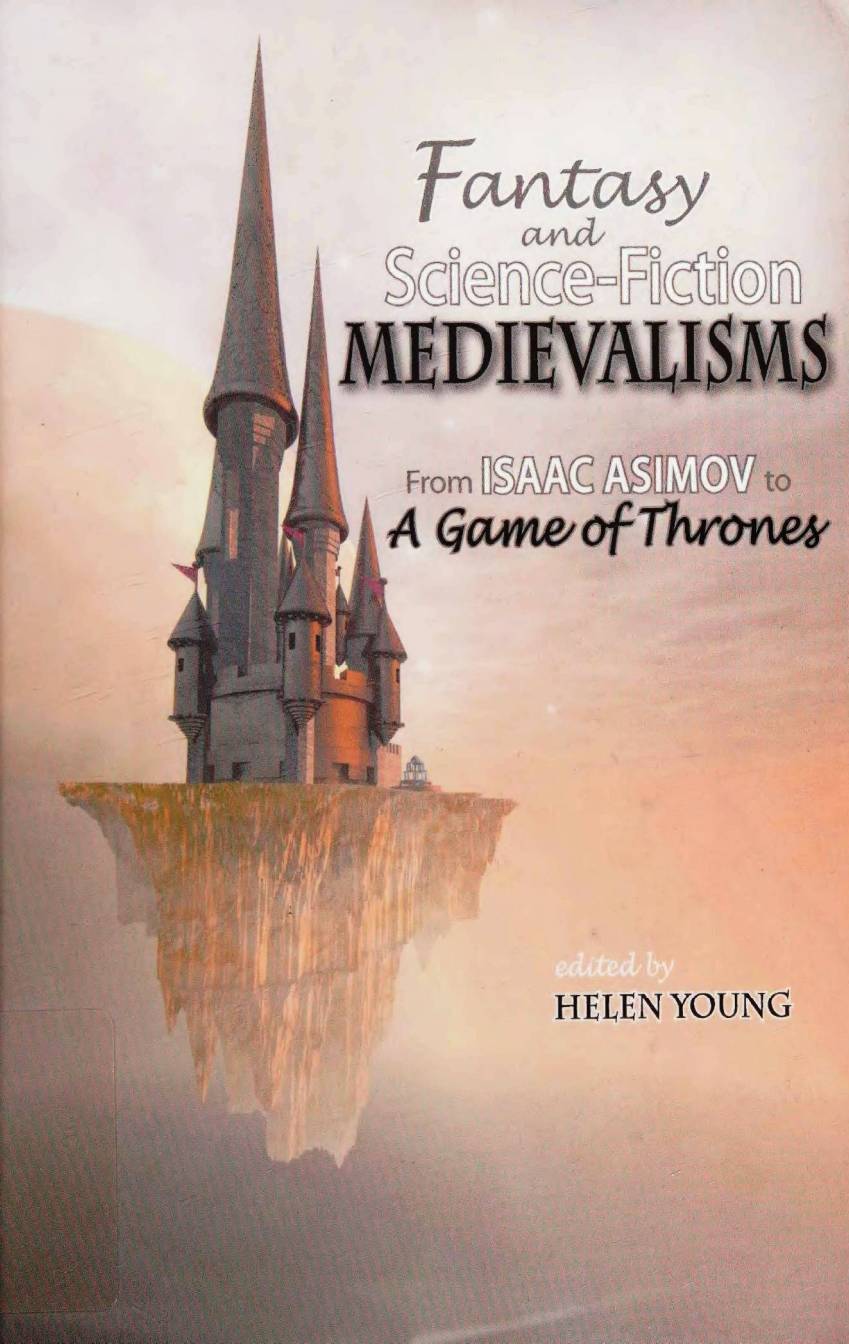
Fantasy
and
Science-Fiction
MEDIEVALISMS
From ISAAC ASIMOV to
A Game of Thrones
edited by
HELEN YOUNG

Fantasy and Science-Fiction Medievalisms

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EDITED BY

Helen Young

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Fantasy and Science-Fiction Medievalisms

Introduction

Dreams of the Middle Ages

Helen Young

J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was a defining work for the fantasy genre, substantially contributing to the creation of an audience as well as a publishing category and what became its conventions.[1] *The Lord of the Rings* was also a major entry point for medievalism into twentieth-century popular culture and made an impact far beyond the fantasy genre that it helped make.[2] In his important *Inventing the Middle Ages*, Norman Cantor acknowledged Tolkien's contribution to academic medieval studies but wrote that Tolkien and his friend C. S. Lewis made greater contributions to modern visions of the Middle Ages through their creative works because they "immersed the ... reader in medieval worlds and made that person a participant."[3] Tolkien's presence in popular culture has reached even greater heights and has far surpassed that of Lewis since Cantor wrote in 1991.

Like the names Shakespeare, Dickens, and Dante, *Tolkien* has taken on adjectival qualities in the everyday lexicon of English. The word *Tolkienian* was coined by Lewis in 1954 and simply meant "of or pertaining to Tolkien or his writing."[4] Like *Shakespearean*, *Dickensian*, and *Dantean*, however, *Tolkienian* has resonances and connotations beyond the literal; *Urban Dictionary* offers this: "like Tolkien, i.e. fantastic, epic, melodramatic, and or verbose."[5] To this not always complimentary list one might add *medieval*.[6] The new connotations, which derive ultimately from the author and his works but interpret them and add layers of meaning, demonstrate that Tolkienian medievalisms are the product not merely of the man himself but also of the culture that received and reinterpreted his work, as the first chapter in this collection argues. If Tolkien is a lens through which to see the Middle Ages, the glass has been polished with many cloths.

Tolkien's medievalism has been the topic of scholarly discussion for decades. Such work often, if not exclusively, involves excavation of his medieval sources and their influence on his various creative outputs.[7] In the ongoing discussions of the terminology of medievalism, his work is more likely to be associated with what David Marshall has termed "romantic medievalism" than with the neomedievalisms of fantasy;[8] it is pastist, historicized if not historical, and nostalgic.[9] One key point of difference between the two ends of this discursive spectrum is the type of connection a text or practice has with the past: romantic medievalism, in this terminology, has contact with the Middle Ages, but neomedievalism does not, instead accessing them via what Amy Kaufman terms "a medievalist intermediary." Neomedievalism, she suggests, is "not a dream of the Middle Ages, but a dream of someone else's medievalism. It is medievalism doubled up upon itself."[10] Both science fiction and fantasy can be considered neomedieval in that they are less interested in accurate or authentic reproductions of history than they are in the concerns of the present and because they access the past through multiple intermediate reimaginings of it, Tolkien's among them.[11] In twenty-first-century

popular culture, genre neomedievalisms might be read as Tolkienian dreams—or nightmares—but this is not the end of the story.[12]

In a 2012 issue of the *New York Review of Science Fiction*, epic-fantasy author Steven Erikson took to task scholarship on fantasy in general for failing to engage with contemporary popular writing. For Erikson, his own writing and that of many of his contemporaries is "post-Tolkien"—that is, neither imitating nor directly reacting against Tolkien and his work. Erikson's formulation gestures toward new and more complex paths through the maze of medievalism, genre, and medievalisms of genre that is often bridged with oversimplified dichotomies of original and imitative, good and bad, and fantasy and science fiction. The *post* in *post-Tolkien* here tends toward the *post* in *postcolonial* or *postmodern*, indicating a complex and at times difficult relationship with the second half of the coupling. Genre medievalism in the twenty-first century is not just the medievalism of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, nor is it either pure imitation or rejection of it: it is, rather, the product of decades of reception, reworking, and reimagination not only of Tolkien's work but of multiple other medievalisms—both earlier and later than Tolkien's—as well. The neomedievalisms of twenty-first-century speculative genres are post-Tolkien in this sense; they can be a dream of a dream, a dream of a nightmare, or a dream of dreams.

One purpose of this volume is to illuminate how the manifold layers of meaning attached to *medieval* in fantasy and science fiction are constructed. These meanings shift with genre convention and bring about their own changes as authors and audiences engage with what has gone before as well as with their own historical moments. All reimaginings of the Middle Ages are influenced by the cultural contexts in which they are produced and by earlier eras' versions. Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint, discussing science fiction, argue that "genres are ... fluid and tenuous constructions made by the interactions of various claims and practices by writers, producers, distributors, marketers, readers, fans, critics and other discursive agents."[13] As these agents shape genres, they also shape

the medievalisms within them into dreams of dreams of the Middle Ages —those of producers and consumers, as well as of artists and audiences.

For decades fantasy has been imagined as imitation of Tolkien's work and science fiction as its antithesis, but such constructs vastly underestimate the complexities of both genres and their interactions. Medievalism—specifically, Tolkienian medievalism—is widely considered one of the defining features of fantasy as a genre[14] and, inaccurately, one that separates it from its sibling in the speculative family, science fiction. Frederic Jameson has found the Middle Ages not only in the content of fantasy—the swords, armor, and feudal political systems—but also in what he has argued is the internal logic of the genre itself, contrasting it with science fiction,[15] and author China Miéville takes a similar position, characterizing Tolkien's medievalism as "feudalism lite."[16] Yet medievalism, albeit often in forms different from those found in fantasy, has been at the heart of science fiction since before *The Lord of the Rings* was published let alone became a best-seller, as is demonstrated in chapter 7 of this volume. In the twenty-first century, the boundaries between fantasy and science fiction have become increasingly blurred, and both genres have arguably moved into a post-Tolkienian mode; Tolkien's voice is loud but has had neither the first nor the last word on medievalisms in speculative genres.

The most extensive body of work on popular culture medievalisms to date can be found in film studies,[17] a field that also sees a considerable proportion of work on popular-culture genres.[18] Both fantasy and science fiction, however, are increasingly multimedia in nature, and adaptations from one medium to another form a staple of contemporary medievalism and genre, both separately and together. The *Game of Thrones* franchise, based on George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels, is one of the most prominent current examples, but all the major speculative-fiction franchises operate in multiple media, frequently taking on what Henry Jenkins terms "transmedia" qualities by telling new stories across different platforms.[19] In this context, medievalisms move across media, not only

within individual franchises but also between them and in the genres much more broadly. Individual chapters in this volume generally focus on a single medium, most commonly print, but the collection as a whole reflects the multimedia nature of contemporary popular genres.

The first section, "The Afterlives of Middle-Earth," explores responses to *The Lord of the Rings*. The novels are widely considered both a foundation and a touchstone for popular-culture medievalism, but their prominent place depends on their reception and their adaptation alike. In the first chapter, Chris Bishop considers the reception of Tolkien's novels from their paperback publication in the 1960s United States to the present day, tracking the process by which a work that was conceived as "high" art became "low," part of mass culture. The very appearance of Tolkien's novel in paperback was seen as an indicator of its countercultural status. Tolkien's nostalgia for medievalism and a rustic simple life suited the hippy rejection of technology and a return to nature. *The Lord of the Rings* also fed a powerful American appetite for medievalism that soon manifested itself not only through a new wave of pulp-fiction fantasy but also through the emergence of adult-audience comic books, historical reenactment, and immersive role-playing games. The second chapter of this book explores Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* as a medievalist visual narrative that interacts with many other visual and written texts (medieval as well as medievalist); as Margarita Carretero-González shows, Tolkien's novels constitute the central but certainly not the only one. Anglo-Saxon epic and elegiac poetry, Scandinavian sagas, Tolkien's letters, and Victorian literature and painting, as well as the illustrated versions of Tolkien's books, are some of the intertexts that find their way into the final result.

The second section, "Dirt and Grit," focuses on the subgenre of gritty fantasy, known best through Martin's *Game of Thrones* franchise. Gritty or "grimdark" fantasy claims to be a reaction against what is seen as a romanticized, even bowdlerized, version of the Middle Ages inspired in fantasy by the imitation of Tolkien's work. Shiloh Carroll explores

Martin's reworking of the fantasy tropes of knights and princesses in the first chapter of this section, focusing on the characters of Jaime Lannister and Sansa Stark. Martin has fetishized a version of the Middle Ages that he believes is as authentic as possible under the circumstances, and this fetishization leads to the inclusion of problematic elements, such as rape, incest, chattel slavery, and violence against women. Martin justifies the physical, emotional, and psychological abuse of his characters by claiming that his world is more realistic than other fantasy worlds, but in truth it is merely a more violent and amoral neomedievalist fantasy. Chapter 4 compares *Raoul de Cambrai*, a grim medieval *chanson de geste*, with the grimdark modern novel *The Heroes* by Joe Abercrombie. Here, Gillian Polack moves away from the source studies that have been a staple of medievalist criticism to explore the specific techniques that each work uses to build the tension and darkness for which the tales are famous, comparing the medieval with the modern by examining how each tale achieves tension, what level of characterization is important and how that level is achieved, and the role of place, of honor, of loyalty in each story. Andrew B. R. Elliott examines the use of sex and violence in *Camelot* and *The Pillars of the Earth* in chapter 5, offering a perspective that encompasses fantasy and historical drama. He argues that the wave of dirty, violent medieval worlds is not, in fact, a wave but a phenomenon explained by two trends. The first, an economic imperative, is linked to television ecologies and decisions made in the boardroom rather than the archives; this means that there are simply more medieval worlds on offer, only some of which are dirty or violent. The second trend, a historical imperative, suggests that those worlds fit into a broader rhetoric of depictions of the Middle Ages and concerns about verisimilitude, accuracy, and changing audience expectations.

The next section examines science fiction, demonstrating how pervasive medievalisms are even in a genre that is often considered the antithesis of Tolkienian fantasy. Don Riggs begins the section by showing that classic works of the golden age—Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* and Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*—draw on tropes established in

Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, imagining future "medievalist" periods based on the medieval world that existed, according to Gibbon, during and after the dissolution of the Roman Empire. He compares them with Pearl North's 2009 *Libyrinth*, which takes up these tropes but reworks them to represent the Middle Ages in much more positive ways. In chapter 7, Steven Gil analyzes Arthurian references in *Stargate SG-1*. Processed through both science-fiction genre conventions and the series' own mythos, magic is remade as science and technology, and the events of Arthurian legend are retold as interactions between advanced aliens and medieval humans. In this reinterpretation, for example, Merlin goes from wizard to extraterrestrial scientist. The chapter demonstrates how blurred the boundaries between genres are in twenty-first-century popular culture.

The volume closes with a section exploring medievalisms that take the fantasy genre beyond the borders of Europe, borders that became embedded as a genre convention largely as a result of Tolkien's work and derivations from and imitations of it. Kris Swank considers the burgeoning of Western fantasy literature and media-incorporating settings, characters, and mythologies inspired by *The Arabian Nights*, examining broad trends in literature, film, and television throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in chapter 8. In the final chapter of this collection, Geoffrey B. Elliott offers a reflective account of the influence of genre conventions, exploring dual readings of the real-world inspiration for the culture of the Out Islands in Robin Hobb's Farseer and Tawny Man series. A raiding island culture in a fantasy series immediately conjures Vikings—and even prompts formal argument in favor of that impression—bespeaking a decidedly Northern and Western European bias. Recognizing and negotiating that bias to show that these figures were more likely inspired by the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest allows for a broader conception of what the genre can be and do.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Hartwell, "The Making of the American Fantasy Genre."
2. Carol L. Robinson and Pam Clements coined the term *neo-Tolkienism* to denote neomedievalisms that are specifically adaptations of Tolkien's work. Robinson and Clements, "Neo-Tolkienism: Plays upon Tolkien's Playing with Language," 339–340.
3. The comments were made in 1991, when Lewis's sales outstripped Tolkien's at forty million to eight million, according to the figures Cantor has provided in *Inventing the Middle Ages*, 207.
4. "Tolkienian," *OED*, electronic version.
5. "Tolkienian," *Urban Dictionary*, www.urbandictionary.com, accessed 4 June 2014.
6. A comparison of online search results reveals that more than 70 percent of pages that contain *Tolkienian* also include *medieval*.
7. Major examples include Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth* (1982); Chance, *Tolkien the Medievalist*; Chance and Siewers, *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*.
8. Marshall, "Neomedievalism, Identification, and the Haze of Medievalism." This is at times done grudgingly: Michael Alexander, who considers genre fiction mere "Gothic fantasy," which is not properly medievalism at all, has barely allowed Tolkien and Lewis to sit under that umbrella term in *Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern England*. Much of the discussion of neo/medievalism has occurred in the pages of the journal *Studies in Medievalism*, esp. volumes 17–20, from 2007 to 2010.
9. Lynch, "Archaism, Nostalgia, and Tennysonian War in *The Lord of the Rings*."
10. Kaufman, "Medieval Unmoored," 4.
11. For recent discussions of neomedievalisms, see, for example, Utz, "A Moveable Feast"; Marshall, "Neomedievalism, Identification, and the Haze of Medievalism." For fantasy, see Young, "Approaches to Medievalism."
12. Because neomedievalisms are here considered a subset of medievalism, the latter term is generally used throughout this volume, except where the particular theoretical constructs of neomedievalism apply.
13. Vint and Bould, "There Is No Such Thing as Science Fiction," 48.

14. Tolkien has received exponentially more academic attention than any other genre author. As a case in point, at the time of writing, a search for "Tolkien" in the Modern Languages Association International Bibliography returns 556 peer-reviewed results. There are none for "Terry Brooks," the author whose *Sword of Shannara* is often singled out by scholars as extremely imitative. The same database yields 61 peer-reviewed results for "Asimov," a foundational author in science fiction.
15. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 60.
16. Miéville, "Tolkien–Middle Earth Meets Middle England," n.p.
17. For example, Haydock, *Movie Medievalism*; Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Ages*; Driver and Ray, *The Medieval Hero on Screen*.
18. For example, Altman, *Film/Genre*; Geraghty and Jancovich, *The Shifting Definitions of Genre*.
19. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*. See also Voigts and Nicklas, "Introduction: Adaptation, Transmedia Storytelling and Participatory Culture"; Scolari, "Transmedia Storytelling."

Section I

The Afterlives of Middle-Earth

Chapter 1

Low-Culture Receptions of Tolkien's High Fantasy

"You Can't Always Get What You Want"

Chris Bishop

> "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need."
>
> —The Rolling Stones, "You Can't Always Get What You Want" (1969)

Starting a chapter about Tolkien with a quote from the Rolling Stones might seem somewhat inappropriate. Certainly, it is the sort of thing that would have driven the man himself to distraction. The purpose of this chapter, however, is to explore the space that lies between "authority" and "subordination"—between the aspirations of the author for an intended audience and a projected reception, and the historical actuality of that audience and its reception. What I intend to demonstrate here, in the case of this particular author, is just how large the distance between creation and reception can be.

J. R. R. Tolkien was very much a son of the empire. Born in South Africa, educated in England, he served as an officer in the British army during the First World War. He became the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford University in 1925 and the Merton Professor of English Language and Literature at the same institution some two decades later. Tolkien's contributions to the study of early English literature are considerable and enduring, and landmark lectures such as his *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* are still routinely cited by academics today, but it is not for this work that Tolkien is principally remembered. For most of the world he is an author of fantasy literature.

It was never Tolkien's intention to be remembered for this, nor did he enjoy the attention that his celebrity earned him. Had Tolkien had his way, none of his works would ever have been printed as paperbacks, and the world of Middle-earth would probably never have been transitioned onto the silver screen. In later life Tolkien grew to resent the unkempt and unshaven youths who arrived at his door and was appalled by their desire to learn Elvish rather than Anglo-Saxon. Tolkien died in 1973, too early to see the full transformation of his vision in the world of pop culture, so one can only imagine what he would have made of the strange nexus of derivative fiction, comic books, cosplay, role-playing, and live-action gaming that inhabits engagement with his creation today. Yet it was this low-culture reception of Tolkien that made him so famous, made his vision so pervasive in so many arenas of contemporary art. This chapter, then, offers a brief and idiosyncratic history of Middle-earth after Tolkien, although it must necessarily begin by looking back to a time when Tolkien was still alive.

ONE RING TO RULE THEM ALL

Tolkien's academic career was nearing its end when his most enduring opus, *The Lord of the Rings*, finally found a publisher. He had published his children's book *The Hobbit* in 1937, and the moderate success of that novel encouraged him to commence work on an altogether more

ambitious sequel. The result, after more than a decade of writing, was an epic fantasy novel for adults that ran for several thousand pages and seemed of little interest to publishers.

George Allen and Unwin had published *The Hobbit* but expressed misgivings about Tolkien's new enterprise, and he soon parted company with them. Subsequently, the novel was offered to the publishing house of Collins. Milton Waldman, Tolkien's contact at Collins, suggested that the manuscript be drastically reduced in order to increase its marketability, but Tolkien remained adamant that the book should be printed in its entirety.[1] Tolkien believed that fantasy novels such as his would find an appreciative audience and that the length of his tome would prove no barrier to its acceptance—in 1947 he wrote that it "may be a large book, but evidently it will be none too long in the reading for those who have the appetite."[2]

It is important to remember that Tolkien's views were not merely the product of a writer's myopia. At the same time he was shopping his new novel around to publishing houses, works such as his were beginning to experience at least some commercial success. T. H. White had already published the first three novels of his *Once and Future King* tetralogy. *The Sword in the Stone*, published in 1938, had been followed by *The Witch in the Wood* in 1939 and *The Ill-Made Knight* in 1940. Tolkien's close friend and fellow fantasy author, C. S. Lewis, was also enjoying considerable success with his new Narnia series.

Geoffrey Bles had published Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in 1950 and *Prince Caspian* the following year. In 1952 Lewis was preparing to launch his third Narnia novel, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Moreover, by 1952, the same year that Tolkien asked Collins to publish his novel in its unabridged form, demand for *The Hobbit* had necessitated reprintings in the United Kingdom and America. Both *The Hobbit* and Lewis's novels, though, were intended for children, and Tolkien was essentially asking Collins to publish an adult fairy tale. When

that publisher refused, Tolkien returned to George Allen and Unwin more willing to do whatever was necessary to see his novel in print.

Tolkien agreed to remove the supporting material from his manuscript (portions of which would eventually see publication as *The Silmarillion*), thus reducing it by half. George Allen and Unwin split the remaining prose into three books, publishing the first, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, in July 1954. *The Two Towers* appeared a few months later, in November, and the final part of the trilogy, *The Return of the King*, was in print by October the following year. The Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston acquired the rights for an American edition of the novel and had released the final installment by January 1956.

W. H. Auden was well established within the cultural hierarchies of his adopted America by this time, and a lifelong fascination with medieval literature, which was to result in the publication of his own translations from Norse during the 1960s, led Auden to eulogize Tolkien's trilogy as "a masterpiece of its genre," albeit a genre that he acknowledged some critics found "trifling by definition."[3] Tolkien's friend Lewis was even more enthusiastic. For him *The Lord of the Rings* was "like lightning from a clear sky; as sharply different, as unpredictable in our age as *Songs of Innocence* were in theirs."[4]

It is important to note at this point, however, despite the opinions of Lewis and Auden, who both conceived of *The Lord of the Rings* as high art, just how few copies of Tolkien's novel were initially produced. George Allen and Unwin had reason to believe that *The Hobbit*'s sequel would attract a good readership and was confirmed in this belief when the first printing of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, some three thousand copies, sold out almost immediately.[5] Sales were good, but hardly phenomenal, and this is where the cultural influence of *The Lord of the Rings* might well have finished, had it not been for loopholes in American copyright law and the advent of the paperback in mass culture.

Paperback books were no new invention in the 1950s, but they were achieving a new status. Originally developed during the second half of

the nineteenth century to provide passengers on the new rail systems with inexpensive travel copies of well-known works of literature, by the middle of the twentieth century paperbacks had become an integral component in the promulgation of learning to a burgeoning and less class-bound readership. In 1935 the British publisher Allen Lane had begun its Penguin Books imprint, and in the United States Simon and Schuster followed suit four years later with its Pocket Books label. American paperback companies were also closely associated with both pulp-fiction publishers and comic-book houses—Ace, Dell, and Fawcett all produced both paperbacks and comics.

This association with more innovative forms of publishing further allowed these groups greater freedom in their ambitions. Paperback publishers attached to companies that produced hardback editions needed to ensure the viability of both products. Original editions of new work were to be produced in hardback, and only once a sufficient number of hardback copies had been sold could cheaper paperback editions be commissioned. With no hardback sales to protect, companies like Ace, Dell, and Fawcett soon began to experiment with original paperback publications. The first of these to appear were the Gold Medal Books published by Fawcett in 1950.

These new paperbacks had to work hard to overcome a public perception of illegitimacy. New books that appeared only in paperback were seen as second rate, and even paperback editions of successful hardback books could seem a little tainted. As late as 1960, Tolkien himself had expressed the idea that paperback editions of his work would "cheapen" it.[6] It is unlikely, therefore, that *The Lord of the Rings* would have ever passed into a paperback edition had it not been for the spectacular audacity of Donald Wollheim.

Wollheim, editor of Ace Books, claimed that Houghton Mifflin had neglected to copyright *The Lord of the Rings* in the United States. Utilizing an ambiguity in American copyright law, Ace produced a staggering 150,000 copies of an unauthorized edition of Tolkien's novel in 1965. The

Ace paperbacks sold for seventy-five cents apiece, compared to six dollars for the Houghton Mifflin hardbacks.[7] Although Houghton Mifflin did not produce paperbacks, it worked closely with another publisher who did—Ballantine Books. Tolkien moved quickly to produce a new edition of the novel that was copyrighted in the United States and printed by Ballantine. The author also wrote open letters to his American supporters asking them to boycott the Ace edition. Newspapers across the country ran with the story. In October 1965, Ballantine produced some 125,000 copies of an authorized US edition of *The Lord of the Rings* and sold them for ninety-five cents per copy. Another 10,000 copies were printed for sale in Canada. Within ten months Tolkien, who had been dubious, at best, about ever allowing his work to appear in paperback form, had sold a quarter of a million copies of *The Lord of the Rings* in North America.[8]

The rising status of the paperback novel was signaled in the 1960s by the addition of a paperback best-sellers list in the *New York Times*. On 4 September 1966, *The Lord of the Rings* debuted on that list at number three. By 4 December it had climbed to the top position, where it spent the next eight weeks. In total, *The Lord of the Rings* appeared for forty-nine weeks on the best-seller list, and this at a time when the list ranked only five titles. Eight years later, when the list had been expanded to ten titles, *The Lord of the Rings* appeared on it once again, suggesting that Tolkien's epic remained a strong seller for a good many years.[9]

Tolkien's largest readership, much to his eventual chagrin, was on American campuses. The very appearance of Tolkien's novel in paperback format was seen as an indicator of its countercultural status. Hardback novels were the prescribed texts of crusty professors, whereas paperbacks were new and rebellious. Moreover, Tolkien's nostalgic medievalism and his focus on rustic simplicity also paralleled the hippy ethos of rejecting technology and returning to nature. As Rosemary Jackson states in her early work *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, the "moral and religious allegories, parables and fables informing the stories of ... Tolkien move away from the unsettling implications which are found at the centre

of the purely 'fantastic.' Their original impulse may be similar, but they move from it, expelling their desire and frequently displacing it into religious longing and nostalgia."[10] For many of Tolkien's American readers, visions of Middle-earth became part of a greater whole that involved communes and flower power.

From Paperbacks to Comic Books

Tolkien's success changed the way mainstream publishers viewed the fantasy genre. The ubiquitous presence of the paperback in the modern bookstore has its origin in the counterculture revolution of the 1960s, and writers such as Robert E. Howard and Michael Moorcock would never have become mainstays of the genre without the counterculture's adoption of Tolkien's vision.

Robert E. Howard, best known for his medievalist creation Conan the Barbarian, wrote fiction for pulp magazines from the late 1920s until his suicide in 1936. In all, Howard wrote some twenty-one Conan stories, of which seventeen were published in his lifetime, but like all pulp ephemera, these stories passed quickly from public attention, and within years of his death, Howard was all but forgotten. Companies like Arkham House, Ace, and Gnome produced hardback collections of Conan stories during the 1940s and 1950s, but none of these books seems to have sold well. Tolkien himself enjoyed Howard's stories,[11] but even by the 1960s, Conan was still not a marketable commodity outside a particularly small fan base, a situation that would have continued had it not been for the publishing success of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Moorcock had already found a publisher for the first of his Elric books, *Stormbringer*, in 1965, but Tolkien's success ensured that publishers were keen to continue his contracts. Three years later Fritz Leiber, the author generally credited with coining the phrase *sword and sorcery*, published his *Swords in the Mist*, again through Ace, and the same year, 1968,

Ursula Le Guin published the first book of her Earthsea quadrilogy, *A Wizard of Earthsea.*

John Norman's *Tarnsman of Gor*, the first of some thirty-three Gor novels, appeared in 1966. Terry Brooks began writing his Shannara series in 1967, although it took a decade before the first of these, *The Sword of Shannara*, was finished. Stephen R Donaldson's ten-part *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* began appearing in 1977, and Richard Kirk's *Raven, Swordsmistress of Chaos* appeared a year later. There were, of course, many others, but the publication of *Wizardry and Wild Romance,* Michael Moorcock's 1987 analysis of fantasy literature, makes any detailed discussion redundant.[12]

Suffice it to say that by 1980, largely owing to the success of *The Lord of the Rings*, the fantasy paperback was ubiquitous, but fantasy as a genre was already making headway in yet another form of low-culture publishing. Tolkien's acquiescence to the paperback had begun a landslide, and publishing houses could not work fast enough to supply their new market with fantasy literature. Some of the companies that were producing these paperbacks (Ace, Dell, and Fawcett) were also producing their own lines of comics, so it is small wonder then that the next step in this genre's evolution (or, perhaps, devolution in Tolkien's schema) was to be a foray into comic books.

There had been fantasy heroes in a few early comic books. Crom the Barbarian appeared very briefly in a 1950 issue of *Out of this World*, and this was later reprinted in Avon's *Strange Worlds*. In 1966 Harvey Comics published a story about Clawfang the Barbarian in the first issue of its *Unearthly Spectaculars*, and three years after that DC Comics featured its Nightmaster in issues 82 through 84 of *Showcase.* Such limited runs, however, clearly indicate that none of these heroes succeeded in gaining audience approval. That all changed in 1970 with the first issue of Marvel's *Conan the Barbarian.*

At that time Roy Thomas was working as an assistant editor at Marvel Comics. In that role he was privy to the fan letters that poured in to

Marvel's New York office, and the fans were asking for fantasy—specifically Tolkien, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Howard. Unlike Burroughs and Howard, Tolkien was still alive and very much in control of his literary property. Ace had forced his hand on the matter of a paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, but the resolution had been favorable to Tolkien, and his popularity had grown in a manner for which he was in no way prepared. Still, it had not been his preference to "cheapen" his characters with so popular a mode of publication, and one can only imagine what he might have thought of the idea of a comic-book Middle-earth.

This is not to say that Tolkien was hostile to all forms of animation, but he expressed "heartfelt loathing" for "anything from or influenced by the Disney studios."[13] As early as 1957 Tolkien had been approached by Forrest Ackerman, Morton Grady Zimmerman, and Al Brodax with a proposal to produce a cinematic version of *The Lord of the Rings* that would combine animation and miniature work with live-action sequences. Tolkien was enthusiastic about the artwork Zimmerman showed him and likened what he saw to the illustrative work of Arthur Rackham.[14] Tolkien was, however, extremely zealous in the protection of his intellectual property and strove to ensure that his overall vision was not diminished. He worked carefully to annotate the script that he was shown, and when his suggestions were not implemented, he parted ways with Ackerman, Zimmerman, and Brodax. As he wrote to them in 1958, "I am not dead, yet ... *The Lord of the Rings* is still the vivid concern of a living person, and is nobody's toy to play with."[15]

Tolkien's relationship with the cinema, of course, must have been tendentious at best. His 1947 essay *Tree and Leaf* lamented the "misfortune that Drama, an art fundamentally distinct from Literature, should so commonly be considered together with it."[16] Nor did Tolkien see drama and fantasy as anything more than antithetical: "Drama is naturally hostile to Fantasy," he wrote in the same essay; "Fantasy, even of the simplest kind, hardly ever succeeds in Drama."[17]

A twelve-minute animation of *The Hobbit* by Gene Deitch, better known for his work on Tom and Jerry and Popeye the Sailor cartoons, was produced in 1966 but failed to secure Tolkien's approval.[18] At about the same time, the former professor also refused requests from the Beatles to produce a live-action movie directed by Stanley Kubrick and starring Paul, Ringo, George, and John as Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, and Gollum (respectively).[19] Eventually, in 1969, Tolkien sold the film and merchandise rights to United Artists.[20]

United Artists approached John Boorman to direct a live-action *Lord of the Rings*, but this project failed, and the script spent almost a decade being passed between United Artists, MGM, and the Saul Zaentz Company. In 1977 Rankin/Bass produced an animated version of *The Hobbit* for television using artists from Topcraft, a precursor to Studio Ghibli, to illustrate the cells. The following year Ralph Bakshi directed the first movie version of *The Lord of the Rings* to find cinematic release, and it too was animated. Animated movies were one thing, though, and animated literature quite another.

To this day no comic-book version of *The Lord of the Rings* has ever been produced, and a single, three-issue miniseries of *The Hobbit* was released only in 1989. In the late 1960s, with Tolkien paying such close attention to the commercial treatment of his creations, there was no way that an editor like Roy Thomas could secure comic-book rights, so Marvel looked elsewhere, publishing the first issue of *Conan the Barbarian* in 1970. It was an immediate and unequivocal success[21] and was quickly followed by *Kull the Conqueror* and *Red Sonja*. Marvel's competitors were no less hesitant to cash in on the fantasy boom. Gold Key Comics produced *Dagar the Invincible* in 1972. DC Comics launched its version of Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser with *Sword of Sorcery* in 1975 and followed it up with *Claw the Unconquered*, *Stalker*, and *The Warlord*. Atlas commissioned the short-lived *Ironjaw* and *Wulf the Barbarian* at about the same time, and Wendy Pini began *Elfquest* with her partner, Richard Pini, in 1978.

Medievalisms also began to permeate the established superhero comics, Roy Thomas and Keith Pollard borrowing heavily from the *Nibelungenlied* for an eight-issue series of *Thor* in 1980 (nos. 293–300). The summer issue of the Marvel magazine *Epic* for the same year featured an eight-page adaptation of Wagner's story of Siegfried. Three years later Pat Mills and Angela Kincaid launched their Celtic fantasy hero Sláine mac Roth in issue 330 of the British comic magazine *2000 AD*. The mid-1970s, therefore, saw not only an unprecedented surge in fantasy paperbacks but also the birth of fantasy comics. The paperback boom, however, and the comic-book explosion were both leading toward a new nexus of fantastic interaction, a point at which fans could completely immerse themselves in their longed-for fantasy worlds.

Playing Out Fantasies

Fantasy literature seems to attract devotees who crave active participation in their literary mythos as no other genre does. A recent psychological study of participants in a fantasy-based card game offers some insights into the mechanisms at work here. Researcher and gamer Brett Martin posits that the appeal of interactive fantasy games lies in their ability to offer tangible "participation in a fantastic realm," a realm that has "occupied a special meaning" in the life of the gamer "since childhood." He argues that unlike fiction, "where the story is predetermined and the reader is a passive observer," such games allow participants to become "a central character of influence to the events that unfold in the realm of the imaginary."[22] Kurt Lancaster similarly notes that people "are drawn to role-playing games because these games combine the innate need for people to interact socially, to observe, create, and perform stories"—in short, fantasy role-playing games allow the participant "to play with fantasy."[23] Elge Larsson also argues that role-playing games should be seen "as part of a movement in Western culture towards participatory arts, as opposed to traditional spectator arts."[24]

Leiber was an early proponent of such games, and his most famous fantasy creations, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, were based on a game he had developed with his friend and fellow fantasy writer Harry Fischer. The two characters, one a tall, powerful barbarian and the other a short, mercurial thief, together with their fictional world of Nehwon, had been sketched out in conversations between Fischer and Leiber as early as 1936. In 1937 the two writers spent some time designing a board game set in Nehwon, and, possibly to promote the game, each began composing a story utilizing their new mythos. The results, Fischer's "The Lords of Quarmall" and Leiber's "The Adventure of the Grain Ships," were not to see publication for many years, but the project stayed with Leiber, and he continued to produce fiction using the characters and the settings.

By the mid-1970s, however, role-playing games were shedding their marginal status and emerging as a major medium through which readers of fantasy stories could engage more deeply with the genre. The history of fantasy role-playing games has been explored in some depth elsewhere,[25] so a brief history will suffice here. It is significant that the birth of the modern war game (which uses military miniatures to simulate combat) can trace its origins to the idiosyncrasies of the pioneering science-fiction writer H. G. Wells. Wells's publications *Floor Games* (1911) and *Little Wars* (1913) began the hobby in earnest, although Fred Jane, author of the reference series *Jane's Fighting Ships* had developed a set of rules for recreating naval battles using model ships as early as 1898. Such games enjoyed a steady growth in popularity during the twentieth century, and by the early 1960s there existed several companies dedicated to the production of miniature figurines and models to use in the large-scale restaging of historical battles. By about this time, some war-game enthusiasts were also beginning to see the attraction of smaller-scale combats using fewer figures and concentrating on squad-level tactics.

Henry Bodenstedt's small-scale skirmish war game, *Siege of Bodenburg*, was published in issues six through ten of the magazine *Strategy and Tactics* in 1967. Gary Gygax and Jeff Perren of the Lake Geneva Tactical

Studies Association, a Wisconsin war-gaming club, modified Bodenstedt's original rules to produce their *Chainmail* rules in 1971. Gygax was a long-time and avid reader of fantasy fiction, so *Chainmail* included a supplement that facilitated both individual fantasy-based and historical combat. These rules attracted the attention of Dave Arneson, who had been experimenting with his own innovative system of small-scale war gaming in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.[26] Gygax and Arneson then teamed up to develop a gaming system that they released in 1974 as *Dungeons & Dragons*. One thousand copies of *Dungeons & Dragons* were sold that year, four thousand the following year. Gross profits for TSR, the company that produced the game, rose from some $2 million in 1979 to $8.5 million in 1980 and to $20 million in 1981.[27]

Interest in interactive fantasy games and the success of *Dungeons & Dragons* instigated a number of imitations that began appearing soon afterward—*Tunnels and Trolls* in 1975, *Chivalry and Sorcery* in 1977, and *Runequest* in 1978. Marc Miller's *Traveller*, a game set in space designed to facilitate role-playing, was also published by the Game Designer's' Workshop in 1977. By the late 1970s, role-playing was emerging as a mass-culture phenomenon.

The legacy of Tolkien's vision is manifestly evident in games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, although the intrusion of copyright laws has made some game designers somewhat reticent when it comes to acknowledging this fact. Gygax has repeatedly made clear his personal dislike for Tolkien's work, stating that Tolkienesque elements were included in his games only in order to increase sales. His attitude toward the writer would not have been improved when, in the early 1980s, the Tolkien estate sued Gygax's company for the unauthorized use of copyrightable elements (Hobbits, Ents, Balrogs, and the like), and TSR was forced to remove these from its games. Still, Arneson was an admitted Tolkien fan, and other designers, such as *Tunnels and Trolls*' Ken St. Andre, were also much more forthright in acknowledging their inspiration. When asked in 1986 about his inspiration for designing *Tunnels and Trolls*, St. Andre

was unequivocal: "my conception of the T&T world was based on *The Lord of the Rings* as it would have been done by Marvel Comics."[28]

The lawsuit against TSR by the Tolkien estate was in fact only one of several at the time, and Gygax was quickly forced to remove references to the works of both H. P. Lovecraft and Moorcock. This removal, in turn, created publishing space for another company, Chaosium, to produce authorized role-playing games. *Stormbringer* (1981), also developed by Ken St. Andre, put players into the world of Moorcock's Elric, and *The Call of Cthulhu* (1981) brought Lovecraft's arcane vision to the gaming table. Three years later *Middle-Earth Role Playing* was published by Iron Crown Enterprises. Despite all the legal battles, however, and accusations of Satanism and promoting teen suicide, the fan base of *Dungeons & Dragons* continued to grow throughout the 1980s, and Gygax's creation remained, by far, the market leader in its field. Having lost the rights to Middle-earth, however, TSR began to map out its own mythos instead.

Laura Hickman and Tracy Hickman developed the shared universe of Dragonlance, and Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis then went on to market this universe through TSR's publication of Dragonlance novels, the first of which appeared in 1984. Four years later, *Dungeons & Dragons*' literary output was augmented with the release of DC Comics' *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. The comic book ran for thirty-six issues, finishing up in 1988, but the Dragonlance novels, some 190 of them by 2014, are still being produced today.

By the 1980s, then, fantasy had moved from hardback literature to paperback, from paperback to comics and role-playing games, and from role-playing games back to comics and paperbacks. Fans could not only read the literature, but they could also play out their fantasies around the gaming table. In hindsight, it could be only a matter of time before these games began to spill outside onto the streets.

Historical Reenactment and Live-Action Role-Playing

Live-action role-playing, or LARPing, is the final phenomenon of low-culture reception for Tolkien's work that I examine in this chapter, but it is important in doing so to acknowledge the lineage of this activity and its descent from a particularly ancient and well-established tradition in the West. In 1839 more than one hundred thousand people gathered near Kilwinning in Scotland to participate in a medieval-style tournament funded and organized by Archibald Montgomerie, 13th Earl of Eglinton. Georgiana Seymour, Duchess of Somerset, served as the "Queen of Beauty," and the "knights" who entered the lists included a number of British peers, Count Persigny of France, Count Lubeski of Poland, and the French prince Louis Napoleon (the future emperor Napoleon III). The crowd that attended Eglinton's reenactment was unprecedented in its size, but the event itself was far from novel—at least eighteen such occasions had been staged in Europe in the ninety years preceding it. Moreover, just as Eglinton's tournament sought to replicate earlier jousts, it is known that medieval monarchs often used such events to reenact even older battles—Roman victories, for example—and the Romans, in turn, had reenacted the battles of their antiquity in amphitheaters and arenas. The history of reenactment in the West is long and continuous, and it is a story that has, in recent decades, begun to intertwine with cultural receptions of Tolkien's fantasy.

At the Great Reunion of 1913, Confederate veterans reenacted Pickett's charge in the fields outside Gettysburg. In a show of solidarity and reconciliation, they were met on the battlefield by Union veterans who offered them their hands in friendship. Almost fifty years later, the US National Park Service permitted some 2,500 reenactors to restage the Battle of Manassas in National Battlefield Park. Despite a runaway caisson and some injuries caused by a cannon blast, the event was deemed a success, and Civil War reenactment became a permanent feature of American culture. Reenactors began forming associations

and organizing themselves into permanent units modeled on specific historic predecessors.

This movement from ad hoc reenactment to something more structured appealed to people outside of the United States, as well. In 1968 military historian, war-games enthusiast, and World War II veteran Brigadier Peter Young began the Sealed Knot in Great Britain, a society dedicated to the reenactment of seventeenth-century English civil wars. Two years later the Medieval Combat Society was founded in the UK, and a year after that an even more period-specific group, the Vikings, was established. In 1988 two more medieval reenactment groups, the Company of Saynte George and Ye Compaynye of Cheualrye, were formed.

Such reenactment groups, each with its specific historical focus, have enjoyed relative growth over the last few decades, but these societies remain quite small in terms of membership, and they retain a relatively marginal relationship to mainstream culture. The dedication of their membership, however, and their capacity to allocate substantial resources to the research, development, and maintenance of medieval and medieval-inspired artifacts have facilitated an incommensurate rise in the availability of reenactment costumes, weapons, armor, and other items. This availability, in turn, has made it easier for less-dedicated reenactors to enter the hobby or to create their own subsets within it. Of all the groups that have exploited this growth in the reenactment industry, none has been as successful as the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA).

This is not to say that the SCA has risen on the back of the historical-reenactment industry. The SCA was established almost half a century ago, and steady increases in membership have both funded and fueled the need for reenactment supplies. Nevertheless, in its inception, the SCA was less concerned with historical authenticity than it was with having fun, and at least initially, anything vaguely medieval sufficed as a costume for an SCA member. In fact, the SCA was self-consciously modeled on the medievalism of Lord Eglinton, and the group's initial meetings were overtly nostalgic and unashamedly Romantic.

On May Day 1966, less than a year after the paperback editions of *The Lord of the Rings* had flooded American colleges, medieval studies graduate and author Diana Paxson led a medieval parade through the University of California's Berkeley campus as a "protest against the 20th century."[29] The SCA website states that Paxson's gathering, meant to mark her graduation from college, was modeled on a "19th-century recreation of medieval life called the 'Last Tournament,'" a term used to describe Eglinton's reenactment by the Blackwood Edinburgh magazine in 1897.[30]

After the initial parade, a number of participants expressed a desire to make the event an ongoing one, to form a society to reenact the Middle Ages, and to carry on the tradition begun that May Day. Another participant in the first parade, Marion Zimmer Bradley, who would become famous for her feminist contributions to the Arthurian legends, eventually coined a name for their movement, the Society for Creative Anachronism, and new chapters were soon seeded across the country. By 1968 there were three SCA kingdoms in America, and the society itself had been incorporated as a nonprofit organization in California. At the time of writing there are thirty-five thousand paying members of the SCA and at least as many more who regularly attend its events.

By the 1970s, then, readers of fantasy literature had at their disposal a number of ways in which to indulge their passions. The literature had become abundant and readily accessible. Comics and movies provided fast access to fantasy without the long investment of reading, and role-playing games permitted an extent of immersion in various fantasy worlds. Historical reenactment, though, offered the most tangible immersion experience, and the spread of medieval reenactment made available any number of props that could be modified in order to enhance a fantasy experience.

Even the earliest comic-book conventions witnessed cosplay, as it came to be called, where fans dress up as their favorite superhero or villain. With the success of titles such as *Savage Sword of Conan* and

Red Sonja, fantasy characters became cosplay standards. It was only a matter of time, therefore, before fans combined this love of dressing up and role-playing to create LARP events at which participants dressed as fantasy characters and played out their role-playing games in public areas. War gaming, role-playing games, historical reenactment, LARPing, and cosplay, moreover, were all broadly attractive to the same fan base, as even the most casual observers would have noted. *Savage Sword of Conan* featured numerous articles on the SCA and on cosplay from its earliest editions, and companies like TSR and Strategy and Tactics regularly advertised their products in its pages and in the pages of the Comics Code Authority–approved companion title *Conan the Barbarian*.

Initially, the LARP subculture was almost entirely focused on Tolkienesque fantasy, although it later evolved into a more complex appreciation of various genres.[31] By the 1990s LARPing had embraced science fiction, historical re-creation, modern warfare, horror themes, even Jane Austen–style reenactments.[32] Nevertheless, major European LARP events, such as the annual Elfie festivals, retain a high-fantasy emphasis, as do representations of LARPing in the mainstream media —documentaries such as *Darkon* (2006) and *Monster Camp* (2007), for example, and movies such as *Role Models* (2008), *The Wild Hunt* (2009), and *Knights of Badassdom* (2013).

It is also worth noting at this point the influence of women in both LARPing and cosplay. Lars Koznack has pointed out that women actively contribute as creators and participants in both the LARP and cosplay subcultures,[33] and the research group Ludica has demonstrated that, unlike online and video-based fantasy role-playing, which remain aggressively masculinized, LARP events have been shown by gender-based analysis to boast high female participation in relation to overall participation.[34]

Conclusion

This summary of low-culture receptions of Tolkien's high fantasy is, by necessity, brief, and any one of the areas outlined here would reward a more thorough study. What can be said at this stage, however, is that Tolkien found himself engaged in a struggle to maintain the purity of his vision almost as soon as it was published, and that after his death in 1973—and despite the best efforts of his estate's executors—the pervasive fantasy of his creation continued to power the dreams and the art of a generation. Even today, with the dominance of computers evident in the entertainment industry, commentators such as Celia Pearce still note that "the vast majority of online role-playing games have been and continue to be based on or inspired by J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954–55)."[35] You can't always get what you want, but perhaps, at least, we got what we needed.

NOTES

1. Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (1997), 211ff.
2. Letter 109 to Stanley Unwin, 31 July 1947, quoted in Reynolds, *The Lord of the Rings: The Tale of a Text*, 3.
3. Auden, "At the End of the Quest, Victory."
4. Lewis, "Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings,'" 73.
5. Reynolds, *The Lord of the Rings: The Tale of a Text*, 2.
6. Ripp, *Middle America Meets Middle-Earth*, 41.
7. Ibid., 35–36.
8. "Obituary: J. R. R. Tolkien Dead at 81; Wrote 'The Lord of the Rings.'"
9. Ripp, *Middle America Meets Middle-Earth*, 40.
10. Jackson, *Fantasy*, 5.
11. Cerasini and Hoffman, *Robert E. Howard*, 14.
12. Moorcock, *Wizardry and Wild Romance*.
13. Carpenter, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, letter 13.
14. Ibid., letter 261.
15. Quoted in Croft, "Three Rings for Hollywood," 4.
16. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories" (1977), 51.
17. Ibid., 52.
18. "Gene Deitch's 'The Hobbit' Short Film Surfaces Online Nearly 50 Years On."
19. "Beatles Plan for *Rings* Film."
20. Harlow and Dobson, "Lord of the Rings Is Worth $3bn," 16.
21. Thomas, "The Hyborian Page."
22. Martin, "Using the Imagination," 140.
23. Lancaster, *Warlocks and Warpdrive*, 46.
24. Larsson, "Postmodernity and Participation," 14–17.
25. Tresca, *The Evolution of Fantasy Role-Playing Games*; Mackay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game*.
26. Mackay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game*, 14–15.
27. Lancaster, *Warlocks and Warpdrive*, 34.
28. Ewing, "Ken St Andre on T&T."
29. Croucher, "Latter-Day Knights Battle for Imaginary Kingdoms."
30. "The Eglinton Tournament—The Last Tournament, 1839."
31. Copier, *Connecting Worlds*.
32. Montola, "Urban Role-Play," 266.

33. Konzack, "Geek Culture: The 3rd Counter-Culture."
34. Fron, Fullerton, Morie, and Pearce, "The Hegemony of Play," 7.
35. Pearce, "Narrative Environments," 202.

Chapter 2

Tolkien after Tolkien

Medieval and Medievalist Intertexts in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*

Margarita Carretero-González

When listening to Peter Jackson explain how he approached the design process of his film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is impossible not to hear an echo of J. R. R. Tolkien's own claims regarding the need to provide his secondary world with the inner consistency of reality that would make it believable. Jackson particularly admires the authenticity of Tolkien's imagined world and has expressed his wish to achieve a degree of believability in his movies that could hint at the depth of Tolkien's Middle-earth. In order to do so, he urged his design team to imagine that *The Lord of the Rings* was real history and that they were going to shoot on the locations where the events actually happened; the places, the characters, their clothes, everything had to be authentic. Most likely, Tolkien would have felt very much at home with Jackson's choice, given the insistence on the historicity of his approach to writing fiction traceable in some of his letters, together with the emphasis he laid on

the need to provide any secondary world with the inner consistency of reality, which is at the heart of his essay "On Fairy Stories."[1]

Almost everyone involved in designing Jackson's Middle-earth who was interviewed in the films' appendixes praised Tolkien as a very visual author. In fact, the director avows that the design team could start working even before the script was finished because "all the descriptions of what you want to do are in the book."[2] Granting that Tolkien is, indeed, a very visual author, anyone who has read the books and watched the films should be struck by Jackson's exaggeration. Tolkien himself pointed at the limitations of his visual attention when he confessed to Rhona Beare in 1958, "I do not know the detail of clothing. I visualize with great clarity scenery and 'natural' objects but not artefacts."[3]

Yet it is precisely the type of questions Beare was asking in her letter that a design team must answer when fashioning the physical look of a movie: What type of blade does an Elf's sword have? What clothes does Éowyn wear? What does Elrond's library look like? Clothes, weapons, hairdos, costumes, furniture, and all sorts of other props have to be conceptualized and produced; when considering the variety of races that populate Middle-earth, designing their cultures becomes a challenge. Every single artifact exclusively produced for the film is the result of a series of texts of different natures (visual, oral, written, fictional, historical, even archaeological), most of which have nothing to do with Tolkien's hypotext. This chapter examines some of the intertexts—both the indisputable and the possible ones—that constitute the resulting hypertext that is Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*. I borrow Tolkien's words in agreeing with him on the care with which source criticism must be approached, given that "the ways in which a story-germ uses the soil of experience are extremely complex, and attempts to define the process are at best guesses from evidence that is inadequate and ambiguous,"[4] yet I also argue that part of the job of literature scholars is precisely "to unravel the intricately knotted and ramified history of the branches on the Tree of Tales."[5] Very often, all one can do is surmise, bringing to

the text one's own soil of experience, but this is, after all, part of the hermeneutic process scholars engage in, a contribution to the constant actualization of a text. Often while looking at its roots, a particular Tree of Tales throws out some unexpected branches.

Tolkien's avowed lack of attention to the details Beare was concerned about has not prevented artists from producing a colossal quantity of visual renderings of his world that may help fill these gaps. Some of these eventually became part of the textual material woven into the fabric of Jackson's adaptation. Of all the artwork produced since the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, Jackson has admitted to being most impressed by Alan Lee's and John Howe's creations. Not only did the writers cover their rooms with Lee's and Howe's prints while working on the screenplay, but the artists participated in the actual filmmaking process as conceptual designers; their work thus materialized in the film in the terms that Jackson expresses in his foreword to *Myth and Magic: The Art of John Howe*:

> In our movie version of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, it's John's Gandalf that arrives at John's Bag End. Gandalf delights the Hobbits with John's fireworks whilst, many miles away, John's Barad-dûr rises again above the Mordor landscape. And the movie Balrog that Sir Ian McKellen confronts in Moria is a first cousin to the beast you will see in these pages.[6]

Film audiences familiar with Lee's and Howe's works will not fail to recognize their trademarks in the different areas and characters of the film.[7] Even though they collaborated in most of the designs, their "labours seemed to divide up quite naturally, with John concentrating on the darker aspects of Middle-earth [while Alan] kept mainly to the safer side of the Anduin," with the exceptions of "John's designs for the Bucklebury Ferry, the Green Dragon Inn and the beautifully detailed Bag End set."[8]

For the medievalist look Jackson required the design team to achieve, the choice of Lee and Howe to provide the film's main scenic inspiration proved to be an excellent one. Lee is, according to Brian Sibley, "an artist

with an unerring eye for depicting the fantastic as if it were a part of our everyday lives,"[9] and his fascination with Norse and Celtic legends and myths turned out to be the perfect match to Howe's expertise on medieval history, together with his insistence on "the need to construct fantasy on a bedrock of authenticity."[10] If, as argued in the introduction to this volume, the type of medievalism that best applies to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is Marshall's "romantic medievalism" rather than neomedievalism, I would contend that this is, if possible, even more the case in some aspects of Jackson's films, particularly if one takes into account the efforts devoted to making Tolkien's secondary world "medievally credible" by dialoguing not only with Tolkien's original source but also with other artistic discourses, both medieval and medievalist. However, as Marshall himself has argued, the distinction between romantic medievalism and neomedievalism does not always hold up, and Jackson's film is a very interesting case in point. The films address a different audience from the one who first received Tolkien's books, an audience familiar with a variety of discourses that did not exist in Tolkien's time and that have little or nothing to do with the ethos the author was bringing to his Middle-earth. In order to combine his declared intention of being faithful to the spirit of the book—the concept of faithfulness is itself problematic in the field of adaptation studies—and to appeal to the variety of audiences receiving the product, filmmakers needed to draw on their own "Cauldron of Story," which included both medieval and nonmedieval ingredients.

In order to detect some of the ingredients in the Cauldron of Story that conform with Jackson's visual soup, it is necessary first to look briefly at the variety of medieval and medievalist texts in Tolkien's own cauldron before exploring the possible ingredients in the design team's. Some of these have been expressly acknowledged by members of the team, whereas others may have been unconscious additions, having seeped from the myriads of visual texts that inhabit any individual's mental landscape. Eventually, by looking at the result, this chapter will speculate on the Middle Ages that members of the design team dreamed of (to borrow from Umberto Eco[11]) when conceptualizing and designing

the medievalist world of Middle-earth. Owing to limits on length, the subjects treated here have necessarily been reduced to the cultures of the Men of Rohan and, marginally, to those of the Elves of Rivendell and Lothlórien, stemming from my argument that the way these cultures have been visually rendered at the beginning of the twenty-first century has a great deal to do with the effects that the rediscovery of the Middle Ages and the Northern world in the nineteenth had on the popular imagination,[12] effects that still today permeate popular culture. The Middle Ages dreamed by Pre-Raphaelite art and its implication into the art nouveau style are two important visual referents when looking at the civilizations of Edoras, Rivendell, and Lothlórien.

Judging by the treatment the material culture of Rohan received in the film, Jackson seems to have agreed with Tom Shippey's consideration that even if they were "not the first children of Tolkien's imagination[, the Rohirrim were] the ones he regarded with most affection and also in a sense the most central."[13] For all the significance of the king's return to the throne of Gondor after the destruction of the Ring, the time the film devotes to the culture of the Rohirrim almost doubles that bestowed on the Gondorians, even when combining the time viewers spend in Osgiliath and Minas Tirith.[14] Whether this reflects purely cinematic motives—Rohan is certainly a more vigorous and dynamic culture than the decaying Gondor—or sheer personal preferences, it is evident that Jackson has taken pains in expanding on screen the richness and complexity of Tolkien's Rohan.

A certain preference for Rohan is discernible when watching *The Two Towers* while listening to the design team's audio commentaries and exploring the documentary on "Designing Middle-Earth" in the DVD appendixes. In order to confer on the final product the believability Jackson craved, every set was obviously designed after conscious research and with careful attention to every minute detail, yet one cannot but feel that there was something special about the Rohan culture and Edoras in particular—it may very well be a matter of utter fascination with the

fictional culture or the historical ones it stemmed from—when listening to designers and actors talking about a set with which everyone working in it seems to have fallen in love.[15] Moreover, and admitting that this is a matter of personal taste, I would argue that Howard Shore gave the Rohirrim the best musical theme.

The label "Anglo-Saxons on horseback" that Tom Shippey applies to the Men of the Mark offers an interesting solution to the debate about the possible sources for the Rohirrim, which Tolkien himself started when he made them speak Old English, but he adds that "this linguistic procedure does not imply that the Rohirrim closely resembled the ancient English otherwise, in culture or art, in weapons or modes of warfare."[16] Shippey challenges Tolkien's claim, looked into the similarities between the two cultures, and concluded that the Rohirrim "are not to be equated with the Anglo-Saxons of history, but with those of poetry, or legend."[17]

In rendering the Rohirrim as Anglo-Saxons who fight on horseback, Jackson's first debt has been unquestionably to Tolkien's text. The design team's efforts to bring out the centrality of horses to this culture are evident even to the inattentive eye: the animals are central to the stories visually narrated in the tapestries that decorate Meduseld, and they symbolically share the throne with the king, carved into the actual chair's armrest. Horses' heads as decorative elements are ubiquitous in Edoras; they are found intertwined on the roofs of the houses, on the capitals of columns, on the riders' helmets, swords, and saddles, and in the "bright spring [that] gushed from a stone carved in the likeness of a horse's head,"[18] taken from Tolkien's text. It was Jackson's idea to show the reverence the Rohirrim held for their horses by placing the stables on top of the hill, close to the Golden Hall, and decorating them as beautifully and grandly as the hall itself, to such an extent that they display "a little of the loftiness that you find in a cathedral."[19]

The materialization of Edoras and Meduseld in the film follows closely Tolkien's description, as well as the illustrations by Lee and Howe. These were three central intertexts used to construct the set once the appropriate

location was found. There is, however, another text that contributed to the conceptualization of the capital city of Rohan, "a setting that would have been very familiar to Tolkien from his readings of *Beowulf*."[20] Shippey already expanded upon Tolkien's reconstruction of the arrival of Beowulf and his men at Heorot in Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli's at Meduseld not only in the different stages the travelers have to pass before accessing the throne but also in the way the hall is introduced to the readers of both texts. In the novel, Legolas describes the city as he sees it from a distance, discerning "the roofs of houses; and in the midst, set upon a green terrace, there stands aloft a great hall of Men. And it seems to my eyes that it is thatched with gold. The light of it shines far over the land. Golden, too, are the posts of its doors." Gandalf adds, "Edoras those courts are called ... and Meduseld is that golden hall. There dwells Théoden son of Thengel, King of the Mark of Rohan."[21] The names chosen for the city and the hall allow the reader learned in Old English to connect the Rohirrim with the Anglo-Saxons: *edoras* is the plural form of *edor*, which is Old English for "building," "enclosure," or, following Tolkien, "the courts,"[22] whereas *meduseld* is simply Old English for "mead hall." A look at the recently published translation of *Beowulf* by Tolkien allows one to see the linguistic similarities between the two halls: "The men hastened striding together until they could descry the builded hall adorned bright with gold, foremost it was in fame of all the houses under heaven among the dwellers upon earth, wherein the mighty one abode; the light of it shone over many a land."[23] No wonder, then, that Alan Lee designed the setting as he had always envisioned it when reading Tolkien's text: as the Heorot in *Beowulf*,[24] even if, as Michael D. C. Drout claims, "in literary terms [Tolkien's description of Meduseld] is very obviously taken from William Morris' *The House of the Wolfings*, even down to specific details and words."[25]

Whether the Rohirrim in Tolkien's book are inspired by the Anglo-Saxons or they are meant to relate to any Northern European warrior society, when rendering the culture visually Jackson's creative team definitively strengthened the connection not only visually, as Drout

suggests,[26] but also in the way the script departs from Tolkien's original text, whether by changing plot elements or by inventing and adding new scenes.

As regards the use of purely cinematic techniques, apart from the meticulous construction of the Rohan sets, the epic shots allow Jackson to elaborate on Tolkien's theory of "Northern courage," which he saw most clearly expressed in *The Battle of Maldon*, the poem that may have inspired Tolkien's fiction the most after *Beowulf*.[27] Tolkien considered *The Battle of Maldon* "the finest expression of the northern heroic spirit, Norse or English; the clearest statement of the doctrine of uttermost endurance in the service of indomitable will,"[28] qualities that clearly apply to the Rohirrim and that are magnificently rendered in the dialogues but also visually by means of impressive wide-shot angles and the use of Massive[29] to digitally create the armies of Orcs seen by riders as they face them in the battles of Helm's Deep and the Pelennor Fields, two of the epic moments in the film trilogy.

Jackson's decision to expand upon the chapters that Tolkien devotes to Rohan may very well have been motivated by purely commercial reasons, for the dynamism the battle scenes confer to the film and the development of the romantic plot between Éowyn and Aragorn must have widened its appeal; yet it may also stem from a desire to pay tribute to the literature and culture that constituted Tolkien's professional field of expertise and to visually create the mythology that he felt England had lost with the Norman invasion. Some instances in which the script departs from Tolkien's book—either through addition of new material or alteration of plot elements—allow the viewer to consider the presence of other intertexts taken from Anglo-Saxon literature and culture in the visual narrative. Éomer's exile is one example of such alterations that invites this kind of reading.

Having the king's nephew banished rather than imprisoned as he is in the original text not only contributes to the plot's dramatic tension but also permits the inclusion of the topic of exile, a key aspect of Anglo-

Saxon culture and literature, marginally present in *Beowulf* but central to so many Anglo-Saxon elegies. One of these, *The Wanderer*, finds its way into both Tolkien's and Jackson's narratives although by different means. Tolkien has Aragorn recite a poem about Eorl, the first king of the Mark, in the alliterative meter of Anglo-Saxon poetry as they approach Edoras. The first lines are borrowed from the part of the elegy that introduces the ubi sunt topic when the speaker meditates upon the fate awaiting all humankind. Once again, Jackson has strengthened the connection between the Rohirrim and the Anglo-Saxons by giving a reduced version of the poem to Théoden just as he prepares for the battle of Helm's Deep. The alliterative rhyme of the Anglo-Saxons is more evident in Tolkien's original because it is longer, but giving the central ubi sunt motif of the elegy to the leader of a nation facing extermination is in perfect consonance with the elegiac mood of the scene.[30]

The intertexts woven into Jackson's visual rendition of Rohan's culture come not only from the literature of the Anglo-Saxons but also from archaeological findings, as evidenced by the similarities between the Rohirrim helmets and those found in Anglo-Saxon burial sites. Even though the most frequently mentioned artifact is the Sutton Hoo helmet, a closer comparison can be established with the one found at Coppergate in York, which strikingly resembles the helmet found in the ship burial at Vendel, in Sweden. The correspondences between the burial customs of the Rohirrim and those of the Anglo-Saxons can be seen in the "many mounds, high and green ... the great barrows where the sires of Théoden sleep,"[31] directly taken from Tolkien's text, reproduced in Alan Lee's illustrations, and developed in the extended edition of *The Two Towers* by including "The Funeral of Théodred,"[32] a scene that not only reinforces the connection between the two cultures but also contributes more relevance to the character of Éowyn.

In the scene, a group of warriors carries the dead body of the king's son from the hall to the mound where he is to be buried. As they approach the tomb, Éowyn sings a dirge in Old English lamenting the death of the

young warrior, while women take over from the men when it comes to introducing the body to the tomb. According to co-writer of the films Philippa Boyens, this was an attempt to bring to life a pagan ritual present in many cultures in which women are the ones in charge of giving the body back to the earth,[33] thus reinforcing the female aspects of *womb* and *tomb* in goddess-worshipping cultures. There is no reference to this sort of female participation in Beowulf's funeral, since the warriors are the ones said to lay the king's body in the middle of the pyre and then ride around the tomb changing dirges, but Jackson seems to have taken one of the few lines toward the end of the poem in which "a Geatish maiden with braided tresses" makes a lament for Beowulf, "singing in sorrow,"[34] and built upon it, giving Éowyn the role of the singer and clearly alluding to the Geatish woman by having her hair braided up for the only time in the film.

Intentionally or not, the movie elaborates on the several roles that Germanic women played in pre-Christian times, thus agreeing with modern critical readings of Anglo-Saxon texts that foreground elements of their culture that failed to be noticed by nineteenth-century scholars who tended to recreate them according to their own cultural paradigms and relegated women to an unmerited secondary position.[35] The character of Éowyn is a very interesting example to illustrate my argument, yet it is not the only one.

As a Germanic woman, Éowyn fulfills the roles of peace weaver and shield maiden. The peace weaver appears in both Tolkien's and Jackson's narratives—though less in the film—whenever she performs the ceremony of the cup. Both texts, however, concentrate on her role as shield maiden. From her very first appearance, the film presents Éowyn as a very energetic, restless woman always on the move and, as in Tolkien's text, eager to achieve honor in battle. Like any loyal member of the comitatus, she prefers losing her life to deserting her king and leaving his agonizing body to be devoured by the Nazgûl. Sadly, as Marjorie Burns has observed,[36] Éowyn is not textually given any public praise

for her contribution to destroying the witch king of Angmar. Neither is she given any in the film. However, Jackson's adaptation at least grants her the king's recognition and dying words in a moving scene that visually is ultimately an inversion of the gender roles in *Hervor's Death*, by Norwegian painter Peter Nicolai Arbo (1831–1892), another artist whose work displays the fascination with the Middle Ages and the Northern world that swept through Europe in the nineteenth century.[37] Whether the design team knew the painting is not the most relevant question here; what is interesting to note is the legacy this medievalist tradition has left in the visual rendering of Tolkien's text.

The screenwriters may have chosen to play down Éowyn's role as cup bearer in order not to risk having a modern audience wrongly interpret a ceremony that in Germanic societies signaled the central position of women in keeping the peace. The theatrical version of the scene "Return to Edoras"[38] omits its opening with Éowyn's offer of the ritual cup to King Théoden during the celebration of the victory in the battle of Helm's Deep, a moment that is retained in the extended edition. After taking the cup from his niece, Théoden toasts the dead while Éowyn places herself a few steps behind the king, to his right, in the same line as her brother, Éomer, who stands to the king's left. After a comic interlude involving a drinking contest between Gimli and Legolas, Éowyn offers the cup to Aragorn, saluting him in Old English: "*Westu, Aragorn, hál*" (Be well, Aragorn). The way in which she performs the ritual connects her with the literary character of Queen Wealhtheow in *Beowulf* and with the folklore and mythologies of the Germanic tribes: the ritual cup was always presented first to the king and then to other members of the comitatus, to whom the cup bearer addressed well-wishing words, according to the rank she established.[39] In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Éowyn performs this ceremony on several occasions: in "The Passing of the Grey Company," to wish Aragorn and his company good speed before they leave to cross the Paths of the Dead, and in "Many Partings," after Théoden's funeral, to hail Éomer as the new king.

The cup-bearing ritual allows the reader to relate Éowyn to the character of Galadriel, since she also performs the ceremony when she sees the fellowship off in "Farewell to Lórien," which also connects her to pre-Christian Germanic cultures that believed in the principle of women as both cupbearers and peace keepers. This association is completely forsaken in the film, although some of its traits are preserved in the lady's gift giving. Alan Lee summarizes the terms in which Galadriel appeals to viewers' collective unconscious as follows:

> Galadriel is an archetypal figure; one of a long line of fays and faerie queens that run through our literary heritage, offering guidance, reproach or a shining ideal to generations of brave—but hesitant or forgetful—questing heroes. As a seer her pedigree goes back to the earliest images of the Earth-mother, and as a giver of magical gifts she is the fairy godmother of countless tales. She is also the fairy helper, who will appear at crucial moments and offer advice, a charm or simple item which will turn out to be a light to ward off monsters, a rope to scale a cliff, or a cloak to conceal you from your enemies.[40]

Lee did not mention any Northern deity in the list of archetypal ancestors for Galadriel, yet even if her role as cup bearer is lost in the film—and with it her connection with a central Germanic ritual linked to the sacred feminine—Jackson has established, knowingly or not, a very strong association with Northern mythology through the design of Galadriel's glade. In Tolkien's text, her garden is in an open clearing where no trees grow; for the movie Lee designed, at Peter Jackson's suggestion, an impressive set in which, after descending a flight of steps, as in the text, Frodo finds the mirror encircled by enormous tree roots. No interview mentions the source, but even if the association is unintended, audiences familiar with Norse mythology will almost automatically connect the Galadriel presented in this environment with Urðr, one of the three Norns whose magic well, Urðarbrunnr, was placed under the great cosmic tree Yggdrasill. Cate Blanchett's Galadriel is an exact replica of Lee's illustration for the 1991 edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, but her presence

in the film's glade relates her character to a series of texts that dig their roots into the ancient myths of the Scandinavians.

Analyzed together, the film versions of Éowyn and Galadriel agree with Tacitus's observations on the Germanic tribes' special reverence for women: he stressed that they believed "that there was something specially holy about woman as a sex, '*sanctum aliquid*'; that they had special prophetic powers; that men consulted them and followed their advice on matters of politics and war."[41] The prophetic nature of Galadriel's mirror is clear in Tolkien's text, despite the insistence on the important role played by free will in shaping the future apparent when Galadriel informs Sam and Frodo that some of the things the mirror shows "never come to be, unless those that behold the vision turn aside from their path to prevent them."[42] In fact, everything the mirror shows to Sam and Frodo has happened, is happening, or will come to pass in the course of the book; even if the destruction of the Shire that Frodo sees in the film is prevented, Frodo can see Sauron's eye looking for him, and Galadriel can see the struggle in Boromir's soul and put Frodo on alert.

The prophetic powers of Anglo-Saxon women and the importance attached to their dreams are also hinted at in the film in "Éowyn's Dream"—found only in the extended edition—which deserves closer analysis. The scene opens with a restless Pippin, unable to sleep because of his urge to investigate the *palantír*. The camera then takes viewers to the banquet hall where Éowyn sleeps. Awakened when Aragorn covers her feet and shoulder, she takes his hand and, in distress, tells him of a dream she has just had: "I dreamed I saw a great wave climbing over green lands and above the hills. I stood upon the brink. It was utterly dark in the abyss before my feet. A light shone behind me but I could not turn. I could only stand there, waiting."[43] In the context of the film, the dream can be read as simply an unconscious manifestation of Éowyn's unhappy state, trapped in the cage she so much fears, prevented from fighting, and in love with Aragorn—a love that, she may fear, cannot be requited. Yet a look at the origin of the words in Tolkien's text suggests a more

interesting reading in which the dream acquires prophetic qualities. The words uttered by Éowyn in the film come from "The Steward and the King" in the book. In that chapter, Éowyn is not referring to a dream she has had but talking to Faramir about her present condition: "I stand upon some dreadful brink, and it is utterly dark in the abyss before my feet, but whether there is any light behind me I cannot tell. For I cannot turn yet. I wait for some stroke of doom."[44] The dream of the "great dark wave climbing over the green lands and above the hills,"[45] however, belongs to Faramir. Playing with the scenes from both texts allows one to argue that Éowyn's dream in the film anticipates the words that she and Faramir will exchange in the future; the dream thus becomes to a certain extent a vision. Nevertheless, only Tolkien's enthusiastic readers will be establish this connection, and a smaller number will know that Tolkien had actually given Faramir his own recurrent dream.

The way Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* deals with the intertexts analyzed here and integrates them into the characters of Éowyn and Galadriel, together with the more prominent role it gives to Arwen, deserves praise for the efforts the film crew has taken to make rounder female figures, not an easy task if they had used Tolkien's book as the only source. Granting that the feminine principle is present in *The Lord of the Rings* in the terms exposed by Marjorie Burns,[46] there are not enough female characters to counteract the overwhelmingly male presence in Tolkien's narrative, and very little detail is provided to render them visually. This must have posed a challenge--albeit an exciting one—for those working in the art department; on one hand, the lack of detail allows for more freedom when it comes to conceptually designing a character, but on the other, the resulting design must be consistent with the secondary world depicted in the film. Costume designer Ngila Dickson lamented the scarcity of women to dress[47] but enjoyed the opportunity that the film's further development of the characters Éowyn and Arwen gave her to try different medieval—or rather, medievalist —styles of dresses.[48]

Given Alan Lee's and John Howe's involvement in the film, their own designs must have been an obvious choice to start looking for information to fill the gaps in Tolkien's text. As stated earlier, the Galadriel of the film, at least in the mirror scene, was taken straight from Lee's illustration for the 1991 edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, whereas the Éowyn who gives the cup to Aragorn in his painting for the same book shares some of the traits of Miranda Otto in warrior style but is not fully armored for battle. The Éowyn who fights against the witch king of Angmar in the movie bears more similarities to Ted Nasmith's *Éowyn and the Lord of the Nazgûl*, which appeared in the 1992 Tolkien calendar, than to John Howe's *Éowyn and the Nazgûl*, even though the beast is certainly Howe's. As regards Arwen, her marginal presence in the book may explain why Lee did not include any illustration of her in the book, even if one can argue that some of her traits are found in the one he made for Lúthien, given the many ways in which they resemble each other.

Beyond that of the conceptual designers, however, there is plenty of artwork to draw inspiration from, but not all of it succeeds in the historical look that Jackson wanted his design team to achieve. There were dresses, shoes, cloaks, jewels, and hairstyles to be designed, and the strongest visual influence seems to have come from the Victorian medievalist world of the Pre-Raphaelites and their immediate followers. If Howe had his wish granted and could freeze some of the scenes he loves for their illustrative worth in order to paint them,[49] the resulting picture book would most likely have a Pre-Raphaelite quality to it. If one examines, for instance, the female figures included in the medievalist scenes painted by John William Waterhouse—not a member of the original Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood yet a Pre-Raphaelite artist—it is easy to recognize the cuts, colors, and even textures of the dresses in the wardrobes designed for Miranda Otto and Liv Tyler. I personally cannot help being reminded of Waterhouse's 1888 *Lady of Shalott* whenever I watch Éowyn looking into the distance from outside Meduseld in her white dress.[50]

This Pre-Raphaelite style connects visually the cultures of Rohan and of the Elves, if only through their female characters. The differences between both races are more evident when one looks at the male figures, the Men of Rohan sharing with those of Gondor this clearly Victorian medievalist look, whereas the Elves evolve into art nouveau forms, with the style's characteristic curved lines and its imitation of natural forms and structures, including the Japanese features that were decisive in the shape this style took.[51] In Rivendell, this Orientalism is mostly evident in Elrond's clothes and hairstyle, but is first perceived in the blade of Arwen's sword and is later found in the quasi-Japanese kimono she wears when the fellowship takes leave of Rivendell. There is no hint of art nouveau, however, in any aspect of the culture of Rohan. In fact, the characters of Éowyn and Arwen may be used to illustrate a transition from Pre-Raphaelitism into art nouveau, which is in perfect consonance with the actual significance that Pre-Raphaelite artists Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti had in the context of art nouveau, especially as regards their attention to the female figure.

> Their combination of Archaism and Symbolism gave much Pre-Raphaelite imagery a mystical and almost alchemic quality, allowing artist and viewer to explore simultaneously shared legends and private dream worlds. These features of their work became a powerful influence associated with Art Nouveau. The "Pre-Raphaelite woman," a mystical and abstracted vision in which the sensual is held in check by the spiritual ... contributed significantly to the formation of "Art Nouveau woman."[52]

The influence of art nouveau stands out not only in Arwen's magnificent coronation crown but also in the pendant she gives to Aragorn, the diadems worn by Galadriel and Elrond, the Elves' helmets, and around Rivendell and Lothlórien. The use art nouveau made of Japanese art in order to reinforce the imagined perception of Japan as a "picturesque fairyland"[53] helps to bring about the ethereal quality of the Elves that renders them spiritually superior. Moreover, if nature is art nouveau's

"single most unifying factor,"[54] this style presents itself as an excellent choice for the visual delivery of a race so at one with the natural world.

Tolkien's preferred metaphors for what are essentially intertextual relationships point at the organic nature of his views on how stories are created. Whether they are new "unexpected branches" in the Tree of Tales, spring from the "leaf-mould of the mind,"[55] or constitute the ingredients of the nourishing Cauldron of Story's soup, when looking into all the texts that interplay in a film adaptation, one eventually peeps into the particular cauldron of every individual involved in designing what the film looks like. In the case of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*, the physical text shared by everyone was obviously Tolkien's own *Lord of the Rings*, yet even different readers' visualizations of the same text herald back to the myriads of other texts in their personal stories. Furthermore, I am well aware that in tracing those texts, I have also brought my own cauldron into play. After all, is it not true that everyone takes their own personal story to the reading of others'? The interesting point is not to determine whether the identified texts are present intentionally—some of them may even be unknown to the designers—but to explore how images speak about other images in the cauldrons of artists and viewers.

To end with another conjecture, I propose an answer to a series of really unanswerable questions: Is the visual world of Jackson's Middle-earth one that Tolkien could have recognized as his? Would he have accepted Elrond's library or the Rohan stables as plausible? What would he have to say about the Oriental strain in the Elves' weaponry or about Arwen's coronation dress? Taking into account Tolkien's admiration for William Morris as the author of *The Wood beyond the World*, *The Well at the World's End*, *The House of the Wolfings*, and *The Roots of the Mountains*, it is not difficult to imagine that he must have also admired Morris's medievalist designs. In fact, many of the patterns selected by Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull for inclusion in their book on Tolkien's artwork are clearly indebted to Morris's arts and crafts designs, even as some others display a significant art nouveau influence, the only one that can be truly

ascertained among all other contemporary movements or styles.[56] That same legacy of Victorian medievalism permeates the way popular culture still today looks at the Middle Ages and is decidedly evident in Jackson's adaptation. The always serious challenge of satisfactorily transforming words into images becomes daunting in the case of Tolkien's masterpiece, particularly when the vistas of Middle-earth have to appear credible to modern-day audiences as well as consistent with Tolkien's envisioning of his world. It is, therefore, a good choice to look for inspiration not only in the medieval texts that seeped into Tolkien's story but also in the visual arts that were popular in his time, even more so when their influence can be traced in his artwork.

Although Tolkien insisted upon the limitations that visual arts impose on the viewer, in contrast to the endless powers of suggestion of what he termed "true literature,"[57] he did not object to having his book adapted for the screen: the original project with Morton Grady Zimmerman came to nothing owing to disagreements about the way the book had been translated into a script, not because of the nature of the medium.[58] Almost half a century separates Tolkien's and Jackson's *Rings*; both texts were conceived in different cultural backgrounds and are, in essence, two different cultural products, so that certain liberties were necessary in the adaptation. Yet at least as far as the medievalist outlook of the film is concerned, I would risk expressing my belief that had Tolkien been able to watch Jackson's version of his tale and go through all the additional material included in the appendixes, he would have echoed the final praise to the Ring bearers: *Eglerio!*

Notes

1. Jackson, "Designing Middle-Earth," in the appendixes to *Fellowship*, DVD. In some of his letters, Tolkien insisted on the historicity of his approach to writing fiction, referring to the War of the Ring as an "imaginary historical moment on 'Middle-earth'—which is our habitation" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 183; also see 174, 239, 244 *et passim*), while the need to give the inner consistency of reality to a secondary world is at the heart of his essay "On Fairy Stories" (1988), 75–95.
2. Jackson, "Designing Middle-Earth," *Fellowship*, DVD.
3. Tolkien, *Letters*, 280, in reply to a letter in which Beare had asked him, among other things, about the clothes the people of Middle-earth wore. A look at Tolkien's artwork in Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull's *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, corroborates his statement.
4. Tolkien, foreword to *The Lord of the Rings*, 11.
5. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," 120.
6. P. Jackson, foreword to *Myth and Magic*, 5.
7. Another artist the influence of whose artwork can be felt in the films is Ted Nasmith. For personal reasons Nasmith could not accept Jackson's offer to work on the film, but according to a fan site, "his established base of Tolkien artwork was used as a basis for some of the visual design of the film." "Ted Nasmith: The Uncredited *Lord of the Rings* Films Concept Artist," accessed 27 June 2014.
8. Lee, afterword to *Myth and Magic*, 140.
9. Sibley, *The Lord of the Rings Official Movie Guide*, 54.
10. Lee, afterword to *Myth and Magic*, 141. Weta Workshop's Richard Taylor compared Howe's arrival at the set to that "of an expert who has stepped right out of the Middle Ages and into our time!" Sibley, *Official Movie Guide*, 27.
11. Eco, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages," 61–72.
12. See Shippey, "Goths and Huns," 115–136.
13. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth* (1992), 111.
14. It will be argued that Rohan appears earlier in Tolkien's narrative and, consequently, also in Jackson's, but even in the third film, the time the camera focuses on the Rohirrim storyline surpasses that spent on Minas Tirith.

15. In the audio commentary to the scene "The King of the Golden Hall," creative director Richard Taylor expresses his wish that everyone could have the opportunity to study and appreciate the richness of Rohan's culture as materialized in this setting. The actors' partiality for the set finds its warmest expression in Bernard Hill's (Théoden) praise: "It was the most uplifting place I've ever been to. It was the most beautiful place I've ever seen." Miranda Otto (Éowyn) valued how much easier it is for actors to work in an environment that feels real, as was the case of Rohan/Edoras. See "Designing Middle-Earth," in the appendixes to *Towers*, DVD.
16. Tolkien, "Appendix F," in *The Lord of the Rings*, 1170.
17. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth* (1992), 111. See Thomas Honegger's most recent elaboration on Shippey's successful coinage, "The Rohirrim: 'Anglo-Saxons on Horseback'?," 116–132.
18. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 532.
19. Jackson, Lee, Hennah, and Howe, "Designing Middle-Earth," in *Towers*, DVD.
20. Lee, "Designing Middle-Earth."
21. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 529.
22. Tolkien, "Appendix F," in *The Lord of the Rings*, 1170.
23. Tolkien, *Beowulf* (HarperCollins), 21–22.
24. Lee, *The Lord of the Rings Sketchbook*, 92–99.
25. Drout, "The Rohirrim, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Problem of Appendix F," 255–256. Drout, however, has established the connection between Heorot, the hall of the Wolfings, and Meduseld by adding in an endnote that Morris called his Wolfings "Folk of the Markmen." Ibid. 261.
26. Ibid., 253.
27. Holmes, "*The Battle of Maldon*," 52.
28. Tolkien, *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*, 23.
29. Massive is a simulation and visualization solution system designed to generate realistic crowd behavior.
30. Jackson managed to give an alliterative meter to Théoden's exhortation to his men before the clash on the Pelennor Fields, a speech taken from the utterances of several different characters—Aragorn, Éomer, and Théoden himself—in the original text. The battle cry ("The Ride of the Rohirrim," *Return*, 25:03–25:51), is obviously a variation of the original Anglo-Saxon meter, but together with the triple cry "Death!" and the poignant melody played by the Norwegian fiddle of Rohan's theme, it renders this scene one of the clearest examples of Tolkien's theory of Northern courage.

31. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 529.
32. Scene 21, *Towers*, DVD.
33. Director's and writers' audio commentary to scene 21, *Towers*, DVD.
34. Tolkien, *Beowulf* (HarperCollins), 105.
35. For a recent study of how the translations of Old English texts have been affected by cultural paradigms and have contributed to perpetuating a vision of women as accessories, see Laura Horton-Depass, "Lost in Translation: The Queens of *Beowulf*." Many are the studies devoted to the role that goddess worship played in Anglo-Saxon society before the conversion to Christianity. Among the most influential, whose reading can help viewers see Éowyn in a different light, are the works by Kathleen Herbert and by Christine E. Fell, as well as the collection of essays edited by Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, listed in the bibliography at the end of this chapter.
36. Burns, "Wisewomen," 146.
37. This gender-role inversion in Arbo's painting does not last for long: later in the film, Éowyn takes the same position as the shield maiden Hervor in the painting, lying on a field strewn with dead bodies, where her brother, Éomer, finds her. The colors in Arbo's painting are the golds, reds, yellows, and blues found in Rohan in the film, down to the white of the steed that, in the painting, has survived its rider.
38. Scene 5, *Return*, DVD.
39. Notice the nearly identical opening words used by Wealhtheow in *Beowulf* and Éowyn in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* when giving the cup first to their respective kings: "Receive now this cup and drink in happy hour. Health be with thee at thy going and coming" (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 545); "Receive now this cup, dear lord of mine, giver of rich gifts of gold, and to the Geats speak with kindly words, as behoves a man." (Tolkien, *Beowulf*, 30).
40. Lee, *Sketchbook*, 76.
41. Herbert, *Looking for the Lost Gods of England*, 11.
42. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 382.
43. Scene 7, *Return*, DVD.
44. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 998.
45. Ibid.
46. According to Burns, this feminine presence is found in the "celebration of the qualities traditionally ascribed to women and found in the best of the characters, male and female alike" ("Wisewomen," 128).

47. According to actor Miranda Otto (Éowyn), in "Costume Design," *Return*, DVD.
48. Ngila Dickson, in "Costume Design," *Return*, DVD.
49. In the design team's audio commentary to "Arwen's Fate," scene 38, *Towers*, DVD.
50. "The King of the Golden Hall," scene 20, *Towers*, DVD.
51. A. Jackson, "Orient and Occident," 112.
52. Greenhalgh, "*Le style anglais*,"130.
53. A. Jackson, "Orient and Occident," 112.
54. Greenhalgh, "The Cult of Nature," 55.
55. Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* (1992), 131.
56. Hammond and Scull, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, 11.
57. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories" (1988), 70.
58. See Tolkien, *Letters*, 266–267 and 270–277.

Section II

Dirt and Grit

Chapter 3

Rewriting the Fantasy Archetype

George R. R. Martin, Neomedievalist Fantasy, and the Quest for Realism

Shiloh Carroll

Fantasy literature is often accused of being escapist, of providing a preferable world in which readers can immerse themselves in order to avoid the realities of life. In 1995 P. J. Webster published an article titled "Tolkien and Escapist Fantasy Literature" that attempted to differentiate between "creative" fantasy and escapist or "derivative" fantasy in order to draw a clear distinction between "good" and "bad" fantasy literature.[1] Webster argued that "intrinsically all escapism is detrimental because by its very nature it seeks to avoid reality, it is determined to distract the mind from the reality of life."[2] By separating fantasy texts he considers quality from those he considers "trash," he has acknowledged the public perception of the fantasy genre as trash yet rescued a few texts, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, that he believes have literary value. Perhaps the attitude toward escapist fantasy that Webster articulated is part

of what inspired George R. R. Martin to begin writing *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which he asserts is a more realistic text, both historically and sociologically, than other neomedieval fantasy. In an interview with John Hodgeman, Martin claimed that realism is a major goal for *A Song of Ice and Fire*, saying that he

> sort of had a problem with a lot of the fantasy I was reading, because it seemed to me that the Middle Ages or some version of the quasi Middle Ages was the preferred setting of a vast majority of the fantasy novels I was reading by Tolkien imitators and other fantasists, yet they were getting it all wrong. It was a sort of Disneyland Middle Ages, where they had castles and princesses and all that. The trappings of a class system, but they didn't seem to understand what a class system actually meant.[3]

Although debate on the authenticity of a fictional text's portrayal of the Middle Ages is problematic and counterproductive, Martin's decision to dismiss a sizeable portion of a genre based on his own ideas about the historical reality of the Middle Ages reveals much about his narrative choices in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Likewise, by referring to the fantasy he dislikes for its lack of authenticity as "Disneyland," Martin implies that neomedievalism is for children and that his own works, with their attempts at realism, are for adults. After all, as Clare Bradford has pointed out, Disney's animated fairy tales are marketed to children, and their ubiquity creates the idea that Disney is the original, canonical text.[4] Thus, *Disneyland* becomes a shorthand for childish, innocent, and shallow, and Martin's dismissal of Disney and the texts he deems Disneyland attempts to create a hierarchy of fantasy texts in which gritty realism is privileged over traditional romantic neomedieval fantasy.[5]

Martin told George Stroumboulopoulos that Tolkien's imitators created clichéd characters and plots "that have ultimately harmed the genre and made people think that it's for children or particularly slow adults." Echoing Webster's attempt to separate escapist fantasy from creative fantasy, Martin has defined his work as superior to lesser neomedieval

fantasy (despite obvious neomedievalisms in his own work). At the same time, he fetishizes his own version of fantastic realism, which requires contrast with the "Disney" neomedieval Middle Ages. Thus, Martin has found a middle ground that allows him to align himself with Tolkien yet separate himself from Tolkien's imitators, or the fantasy viewed as inferior and formulaic, even as he conflates Disney's "childishness" with the Tolkien imitators' perceived lack of realism and sanitizing of the Middle Ages.

The divide Martin has drawn between fairy-tale neomedievalism and his own gritty fantasy provides a lens with which to examine a number of the themes and characters in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Martin is aware that many of his readers come to his work from the fantasy novels of Tolkien imitators, with their "Disneyland Middle Ages," and has set up situations and characters to show his audience that his novels will not follow the tropes and structure of the fantasies to which he believes his readers may be accustomed. Indeed, Martin must construct and acknowledge the neomedievalism he sees as childish in his own work in order to tear it down. Martin's disdain for the "Disney" Middle Ages comes through in *A Song of Ice and Fire* as the rejection of several neomedieval tropes, most specifically the ideas of the princess and the knight. The princess archetype, especially the Disney princess archetype, includes themes from courtly love and chivalric romance, such as "love at first sight; the propensity for lovers to daydream, sing romantic songs, and search for the beloved; sequences in which mistaken identity temporarily blinds one or other of the lovers; and obstacles that prevent or delay 'love's first kiss.'"[6] The princess is noble or becomes noble, and her beauty serves as a "manifestation of her interior qualities and/or her noble origins."[7] Likewise, the archetype of the ideal knight also stems from Victorian reimaginings of medieval chivalric romances, such as Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, in which the Pentecost Oath calls for complete obedience to the king, Christian imperialism, truthfulness, chastity, and the virtues of courtly love.[8] According to Antony H. Harrison, the Victorian ideals for knighthood included "such patriarchal ideals as chivalry, manliness,

selflessness, gallantry, nobility, honor, duty, and fidelity (to the crown as well as to a beloved). It also promulgated a belief in the spiritual power of love and the positive moral influence of women."[9] These two idealistic archetypes are introduced, torn down, and rebuilt as Martin sees fit in the characters of Sansa Stark and Jaime Lannister; both begin with a belief in glory and honor, both lose faith in their beliefs, and both find less romantic, more realistic ways of living in the dark world Martin has created. Though Martin's desire to move past the Romantic archetypes of neomedieval fantasy can be understood, his insistence that his portrayal of the Middle Ages conforms to an objective historical reality rather than representing another neomedieval interpretation can be problematic.

"LIFE IS NOT A SONG": THE PRINCESS DECONSTRUCTED

Both Jaime and Sansa, Martin's archetypal knight and princess, begin with idealized views of nobility and knighthood, fed by songs and tales of grand adventures and high chivalry. Sansa expects her own life and the world of Westeros also to conform to these standards. Through Sansa's fascination with songs and tales, Martin's work sets up the neomedieval Middle Ages, laying the foundation for his later destruction of Sansa's beliefs.[10] This setup resembles what Bradford refers to as "priming" in Disney princesses; they show their preparation for heterosexual romance through song, extolling the virtues of their imagined ideal prince in conversation with animals and in daydreams.[11] Early on, Martin's series contrasts Sansa with her sister, Arya, who does not care to be a lady, in order to highlight Sansa's insistence on proper behavior. As they travel to King's Landing from Winterfell, Arya finds adventure everywhere; she searches a ford for the rubies King Robert struck from Prince Rhaegar's armor, learns about the flora and fauna of the Westerosi midlands from a butcher's son, and explores every ruin they pass. Sansa, in contrast, finds the countryside disgusting; where Arya sees adventure, Sansa sees dirt and danger. Sansa refuses to interact with those below her station, whereas Arya befriends them.[12] Sansa believes that Arya's presence

spoils her own experience because of Arya's refusal to conform to social expectations and her own romanticized view of the world; after one of their frequent fights, Sansa says, "She tries to spoil *everything*, Father, she can't stand for anything to be beautiful or nice or splendid."[13] Thus, Sansa is constructed as a hyperfeminine princess figure, highly sentimental, and a believer in an idealized world, in contrast to her more masculine sister.

Beautiful, *nice*, and *splendid* are Sansa's benchmarks for goodness and nobility. She initially thinks of Prince Joffrey as an idealized prince figure, beautiful and noble.[14] Joffrey is not the only person she believes good and heroic owing to beauty; when she meets Ser Loras Tyrell, called the Knight of Flowers for his house sigil (a rose) and his tendency to distribute roses to the young ladies, she is struck dumb at his beauty and gallantry.[15] Thus, when Eddard finds it necessary to send someone to kill Ser Gregor Clegane for his crimes, Sansa is shocked that he does not choose Loras: "When the Knight of Flowers had spoken up, she'd been sure she was about to see one of Old Nan's stories come to life. Ser Gregor was the monster and Ser Loras the true hero who would slay him. He even *looked* a true hero, so slim and beautiful, with golden roses around his slender waist and his rich brown hair tumbling down into his eyes."[16] Thus, in *A Game of Thrones* Martin sets up the conventional notion of outer beauty reflecting inner goodness, as well as the idea that noble birth bestows both beauty and character, in order to destroy both of these ideas later.

Martin's story foreshadows Sansa's fate early, providing hints to Joffrey's nature that Sansa ignores or simply naïvely misses. When Sansa is startled and frightened by the sight of Ser Ilyn Payne, the king's tongueless headsman, Cersei prompts Joffrey to "go to her" before he arrives to gallantly protect and comfort her; when Sansa and Joffrey come upon Sansa's sister, Arya, and her friend the butcher's boy practicing swordplay, he threatens the boy with his real sword, then attacks Arya when she steps in to protect him; after Arya's pet direwolf, Nymeria, bites Joffrey's arm to protect Arya, Joffrey lies about the incident, and

Cersei backs him up.[17] Yet Sansa continues to believe that Joffrey is admirable, going so far as to dismiss his actions based primarily on his beauty and her conscious decision to blame other people—namely, Cersei and Arya.[18] Likewise, because Sansa believes that beauty necessarily indicates nobility and prowess, she fails to realize that Loras is not a model of chivalry. Rather, he employs underhanded means to win a tourney, riding a mare in heat because his opponent always rides a stallion.[19] Yet Sansa's beliefs as well as her inexperience prevent her from seeing the unchivalrous behavior of both Joffrey and Loras; her early characterization is young, naïve, stubborn, and entirely certain of the inherent goodness of knights and nobles.

Early in Sansa's maturing process, Petyr Baelish, the kingdom's treasurer, tells her "life is not a song, sweetling. You may learn that one day to your sorrow."[20] Sansa does learn it; her life at court after King Robert's death descends into the worst possible environment for a teenage girl, most of it at Joffrey's hands. Martin holds nothing back in showing the reader that Joffrey is not the noble prince Sansa believed him to be or even just the spoiled brat he appears to be in the first half of *A Game of Thrones*. Rather, Joffrey—indeed, his entire retinue—is cruel and abusive, subjecting Sansa to constant physical and emotional violence. She gradually abandons her ideas about the inherent goodness of knights, though Martin's book demonstrates the difficulty of giving up one's world view through her initial responses to knights acting in unchivalrous ways. Sandor Clegane tells her about his brother's cruelty, and Sansa responds, "he was no true knight."[21] Rather than immediately rejecting her beliefs about knights being inherently chivalrous, Sansa sets the single—as far as she knows—example of unchivalrous behavior outside the code of knighthood.

However, Gregor is not the last knight she declares "no true knight"; nearly every member of the Kingsguard, the group of knights Sansa has the most interaction with, is at best indifferent and at worst outright brutal. Martin has written his knights as such extreme opposites to the

knights of chivalric romance that it is almost its own trope; nearly every knight in *A Song of Ice and Fire* abuses his power to one extent or another, and only a few, like Jaime, sometimes strive to behave better and act as foils to the other bullies in armor. Besides Gregor, who is the epitome of bad knights in the kingdom, the men of the Kingsguard represent the worst of the bullies, and Joffrey uses them accordingly. When, after Eddard's execution, Sansa tells him she hates him, Joffrey says, "My mother tells me that it isn't fitting that a king should strike his wife" and has Ser Meryn hit her instead, which he does without hesitation or protest.[22] Thus, Martin has placed Sansa in an emotionally and physically abusive environment in which all of her preconceived notions about the goodness of knights and nobles are systematically stripped away. Though Sansa still believes in the ideal image of a true knight, she recognizes that the songs and stories are unrealistic.[23] Soon she comes to think of her former romantic notions as childish, especially when chivalric trappings are not accompanied by good intentions; when Joffrey prepares to ride into battle, he has her kiss his sword (which he has named Hearteater), and Sansa thinks that "[h]e never sounded more like a stupid little boy."[24] Thus, Sansa projects her understanding that believing in chivalric virtues is childish onto Joffrey, despite the fact that Joffrey clearly does not believe in them himself. That Martin pairs *stupid* with *little boy* again emphasizes his assertion that Victorian and Disney medievalist virtues such as chivalry are naive and for children, whereas his own portrayal of the Middle Ages is the sort that adults would understand.

At this point in Sansa's character development, it would be easy to assume that Martin is punishing Sansa for conforming to feminine gender norms, as opposed to Arya, who is self-sufficient and learns to fight with a sword. However, this is only the first stage in Martin's development of Sansa's character. Sansa's next stage, which involves strict governance of her own words and behavior, is portrayed as a smarter, more politically savvy approach that nonetheless allows Sansa to hold on to some of her idealism. Though Sansa is not strong in a traditional masculine sense—unlike Arya, she does not cut her hair, pass for a boy, or learn to fight with

a sword—her strength comes from her ability to read people, remember details about their lives, and say exactly what they need or want to hear. At first, she is merely trying to survive, following Sandor's advice:

> "Save yourself some pain, girl, and give him what he wants."
> "What ...what does he want? Please, tell me."
> "He wants you to smile and smell sweet and be his lady love," the Hound rasped. "He wants to hear you recite all your pretty little words the way the septa taught you. He wants you to love him ... and fear him."[25]

However, Sansa is willing to risk her own safety to protect others; when Joffrey threatens to drown Dontos in a wine cask, she speaks for him, convincing Joffrey that killing a man on his name day would be bad luck. When Joffrey agrees to have Dontos killed the next day, Sansa convinces him that Dontos would make a better fool than a knight.[26] Saving his life earns Sansa Dontos's devotion, and he steps forward to try to protect her the next time Joffrey has her beaten, smacking her with his "club," a melon on a stick.[27] He is also instrumental in helping her escape from the castle after Joffrey's death.

Sansa takes on the role of queen during the Battle of the Blackwater, during which King's Landing is under siege. Cersei demonstrates poor leadership and morale-boosting skills; she drinks continuously, orders the execution of two servants who try to escape, and tells Sansa that "the only way to keep your people loyal is to make certain they fear you more than the enemy." Sansa disagrees, thinking, "*If I am ever a queen, I'll make them love me.*"[28] Later, she has a chance to show her ability to win the ladies of the court; Cersei quits the holdfast, sending the ladies into a near panic, but Sansa calms them, assuring them that the battle is going well and they have nothing to fear.[29] Unlike Cersei, who shows little concern for the well-being of her ladies, instead telling Sansa that if Stannis's forces break into the city that rape, torture, and murder are likely to follow, Sansa steps forward as a leader, working to live up to her own ideals of what a queen should be.[30]

Part of the realism of Martin's world is found in the political maneuverings of the various players in the "game of thrones," and Sansa's ability to negotiate the politics of court is an essential part of her growth from a naïve preteen into an adult in charge of her own survival. She frames the politics in light of chivalric romance, claiming that "a lady's armor is courtesy."[31] This statement, which she repeats several times, either aloud or to herself, carries two possible meanings: Sansa uses courtesy to protect herself from Joffrey's violence, surrounding herself with carefully chosen words to deflect his anger and save herself and others from his impulsive violent acts. At the same time, armor is a knightly accoutrement, and in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the design of armor is important and reveals much about a character. Thus, Sansa is still thinking in terms of knighthood and chivalry, placing herself in the role of warrior by wearing a political armor made of words. When no real knights will protect Sansa, she takes on the role of her own protector.

Like every other stage in Sansa's development, leaving court represents another step away from her previous idealistic outlook and desire to be a princess and later queen. This time, however, Sansa loses not only her place at court but her very identity; in order to hide her, Petyr claims she is his bastard daughter, renames her Alayne, and has her dye her hair brown.[32] Sansa's insistence on calling Petyr "father" and acting as the dutiful daughter can be seen as another way of protecting herself; Petyr has an unhealthy fascination with the women of the Tully family, whom he continuously tries to seduce. Sansa knows that the Eyrie and Petyr's guardianship is another prison, but she recognizes its advantages over King's Landing. After the aforementioned discussion, during which Sansa fully accepts her new role, claiming, "I am Alayne, Father. Who else would I be?," Martin's text ceases to refer to her as Sansa, instead calling her Alayne and even titling her chapters "Alayne" rather than "Sansa." Sansa's unmaking is complete, and Alayne's training in the game of thrones is underway.

Sansa's final appearance to date, in *A Feast for Crows*, reveals Petyr's plan to marry her to the heir of the Vale of Arryn and reveal her true identity, thus returning her to her place as Lady Sansa, heir to Winterfell and Lady of the Eyrie.[33] Petyr plays on Sansa's remaining idealism, which is focused on her own duties and behavior as a noble. Although Sansa has lost her belief in the inherent goodness of the world, she still believes that she can use courtly behavior to live up to her own ideals.

"So Many Vows": The Fallen Knight

Like the noblemen Sansa admires, Jaime Lannister is beautiful to look at, but that beauty is at odds with his reputation. He is introduced as "Kingslayer," a tall, golden-haired man who looks every inch the knight.[34] Eddard warns Robert that Jaime cannot be trusted because he killed his king; though Eddard agrees that mad King Aerys needed killing, that Jaime broke his oaths and killed Aerys makes him inherently untrustworthy.[35] Nearly every other character who interacts with Jaime thinks much the same; the instances of people telling Jaime his honor is worth nothing because he is an oath breaker are too numerous to list here. Just as Sansa is set up as a naïve young girl, Jaime is set up as a monster, an oath breaker, and a child killer.

The brutality of Martin's world becomes especially apparent in Sansa and Jaime's downward trajectories, which demonstrate to the characters and the audience the author's belief that the Middle Ages in particular was a time characterized by rampant cruelty and violence rather than by the Victorian ideals of chivalry and order. Jaime has lost faith in chivalry and nobility, driven to cynicism by the necessity of killing King Aerys and by the resulting mistrust of the people around him. When Catelyn Stark demands to know how he can consider himself a knight when he has "forsaken every vow [he] ever swore," Jaime's reply demonstrates the inherent difficulties of chivalry:

> So many vows ... they make you swear and swear. Defend the king. Obey the king. Keep his secrets. Do his bidding. Your life for his. But obey your father. Love your sister. Protect the innocent. Defend the weak. Respect the gods. Obey the laws. It's all too much. No matter what you do, you're forsaking one vow or the other.[36]

Jaime does not explain to Catelyn how these vows came into conflict, but he does tell Brienne later. Aerys planned to burn King's Landing to the ground with all its people inside. He ordered Jaime to kill his father, Tywin, to prove he was not a traitor. In order to save the commoners of King's Landing and Tywin, Jaime kills the pyromancer Rossart and then Aerys.[37] Even before Jaime's many vows come into conflict with each other during the sack of King's Landing, he struggles with Aerys's violent tendencies. Aerys routinely rapes and abuses his wife, particularly after burning a man alive, and her maids report grievous injuries afterward. When Jaime protests this treatment, a fellow member of the Kingsguard tells him that they are not sworn to protect the queen from the king.[38] Jaime is also present for Aerys's execution of Brandon and Rickard Stark, Eddard's father and older brother, during which Rickard is cooked in his own armor and Brandon is bound so that he strangles himself trying save Rickard. Jaime tells Catelyn that during the execution, he "stood at the foot of the Iron Throne in my white armor and white cloak, filling my head with thoughts of Cersei."[39] Like Sansa, Jaime finds a survival mechanism for dealing with the horrors he is not allowed to fight; he dissociates, distancing himself mentally from whatever is happening, which he calls "go[ing] away inside."[40]

As a catalyst for his redemption arc, Jaime loses a hand (a common trope in heroic fantasy), causing him to question his identity: "*They took my sword hand. Was that all I was, a sword hand?*"[41] Because of his prowess with a sword, which, Martin established, was built from his association with and teaching at the hands of Ser Dayne, as well as his social standing, Jaime had believed himself invincible. This belief is evident in his refusal to take seriously anything, including his own incarceration and the

horrors of the war-torn countryside; encountering a pool famous in song, now filled with corpses, Jaime begins singing the associated song.[42] He even finds the thought of keeping a promise to Catelyn funny, for it is the last thing anyone would expect from him.[43] His flippant attitude continues through his recapture by the Brave Companions (called the Bloody Mummers behind their backs), a mercenary group under the command of Roose Bolton, one of the more brutal lords of the land. Jaime underestimates their leader's ruthlessness and does not believe he will be harmed until he is:

> *They mean to scare me.* The fool hopped on Jaime's back, giggling, as the Dothraki swaggered toward him. *The goat wants me to piss my breeches and beg his mercy, but he'll never have that pleasure.* He was a Lannister of Casterly Rock, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard, no sellsword would make him scream. Sunlight ran silver along the edge of the *arakh* as it came shivering down, almost too fast to see. And Jaime screamed.[44]

His time with the companions is the low point of Jaime's redemption arc; as they take him back to Bolton, they tie his severed hand around his neck, give him horse urine to drink, tie him to Brienne on the saddle, mocking both of them, and make Brienne clean him up when he vomits.[45] Finally, he gives up and resigns himself to death, and only Brienne's calling him "craven" convinces him to live.[46] Yet despite his own pain and despair, he offers Brienne some advice about her impending rape: "let them have the meat, and you go far away. It will be over quicker, and they'll get less pleasure from it ... Think of Renly, if you loved him. Think of Tarth, mountains and seas, pools, waterfalls, whatever you have on your Sapphire Isle."[47] He believes he is offering sound advice, for such dissociation was his coping mechanism for Aerys's cruelty. Thus, Martin seems to imply in the text that those raised on idealistic tales and escapist fiction may lack the mental fortitude to face reality, especially when that reality is excessively brutal.

In order to emphasize the reality of his hyperviolent Middle Ages, Martin must create arcs in which his characters adapt to the world he has created; yet for the sake of audience engagement, he cannot allow them to conform to the brutality of the world. For Jaime, this means letting go of the nostalgia of his memories of the golden age, and he questions his own memory of those great knights he served with or fought, wondering whether men were truly better then or whether he only remembers them that way because he was fifteen years old.[48] From the perspective of an adult who has suffered, broken oaths, and otherwise grown past the starry-eyed view of knighthood, the heroism and chivalry of the golden-age knights seem naïve and idealistic. Because his heroes are in question, Jaime also questions himself, wondering, "*And me, that boy that I was ... when did he die, I wonder? When I donned the white cloak? When I opened Aerys' throat?* That boy had wanted to be Ser Arthur Dayne, but someplace along the way he had become the Smiling Knight instead."[49] Just as Sansa once based her world view on tales of romance and chivalry, so Jaime has based his identity as a knight on a golden-age ideal that he now realizes never truly existed. Thus, Martin's work seems to claim that even if the grand tales took place within living memory, that memory may be skewed by romantic ideology or youth.

Like Sansa, Jaime rebuilds himself with a reduced idealism about the world but greater belief in his own strength of character. Brienne's stubborn courage serves an example to Jaime as he begins working his way back to health and usefulness. He begins by finding new role models, primarily the lesser-known knights of the Kingsguard; he tells Loras that most of the Kingsguard knights throughout history were forgettable.[50] Loras replies that "the heroes will always be remembered. The best," and Jaime says, "The best and the worst ... And a few who were a bit of both." Having already lost his chance to be one of the best, Jaime works to keep himself from being counted among the worst. In order to keep his promise to Catelyn Stark that he will return Sansa and Arya to Winterfell, he sends Brienne out to try to find both girls, giving her a Valyrian steel sword he has named Oathkeeper to help with her quest.

Besides returning Sansa and Arya to their home, Jaime also swore to Catelyn that he would never to take up arms against Stark or Tully, Catelyn's families. Thus, when he is sent out to set matters right in the kingdom, he breaks the sieges on Riverrun, the seat of House Tully, and Raventree Hall through diplomacy rather than force of arms. As he travels the kingdoms cleaning up the last of the mess from the civil war and removing bandits, he thinks, "It felt good. This was justice. *Make a habit of it, Lannister, and one day men might call you Goldenhand after all. Goldenhand the Just.*"[51] Jaime also cuts off his relationship with Cersei, whom he discovers he no longer loves after his ordeal. When Cersei's many indiscretions are discovered and she is imprisoned in the Sept of Baelor, she sends to Jaime for help, but he burns her letter.[52] Rather than protecting Cersei from her own mistakes, Jaime leaves her to suffer for them, thinking that "even if he had gone back, he could not hope to save her. She was guilty of every treason laid against her, and he was short a sword hand."[53] Even as Jaime has defined himself by his relationship with Cersei, both as twin and lover, for most of his life, his choice to end the sexual relationship and related dependency helps him to redefine himself as "a bit of both" rather than one of the worst.

CONCLUSION

Although Sansa and Jaime are two of Martin's heroes and seem destined for influence and greatness when the series is finished, the author's fetishization of his version of reality means that he cannot allow them to retain their idealism as it relates to other people or the world in general. Likewise, his claim that *A Song of Ice and Fire* purposefully combats an escapist fantasy requires him to include the neomedievalist fantasy within the text so that he can demonstrate that Westeros is not a traditional fantasy. Thus, his purpose leads to violent reeducation for his characters, demonstrating through their experiences that his version of the Middle Ages is by nature violent and oppressive. Martin's disdain for medievalism as expressed in other neomedieval fantasy texts indicates a

disdain for escapism in general and for neomedieval fantasy in particular. In a way, Martin forces his readers to emotionally traverse the same path his characters do; the descending, disillusioning trajectories of Sansa and Jaime are mirrored by readers whose prior exposure to neomedieval fantasy was of the escapist variety. By setting up Sansa as an ideologically traditional Disney princess, Martin has created expectations that his novels will follow a traditional neomedieval fantasy storyline. However, just as Sansa learns that "life is not a song," so do the readers learn that Martin has no intention of satisfying their expectations—instead purposefully destroying them.

Ironically, though Martin has professed great admiration and respect for Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*[54] and appears to believe that *A Song of Ice and Fire* is a spiritual successor to that work in a way that the Tolkien imitators' works have never managed to become, in many ways, his rejection of a Disneyland, Victorian medievalism is also a rejection of Tolkien's beliefs about fantasy and the Middle Ages. Tolkien famously argued *for* escapism in "On Fairy-Stories," claiming that it is necessary for a healthy mind and not something to be feared or shunned.[55] He also argued against Martin's tendency to cast fantasy as a child's genre, claiming that "Fairy-stories have in the modern lettered world been relegated to the 'nursery,' as shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the playroom, primarily because the adults do not want it, and do not mind if it is misused."[56] Martin's insistence on realistic fantasy is contrary to Tolkien's aesthetic, which was born of dissatisfaction with his own era; as Verlyn Flieger notes, Tolkien had "a nostalgic longing for a return to a lost past coupled with the knowledge that this was impossible save in the realm of imagination."[57] Thus, Martin's stated ideas about neomedieval fantasy and its escapist tendencies are at odds not only with the bulk of fantasy literature but with Tolkien's ideas about fantasy as well.[58]

NOTES

1. Brian Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy* takes on this debate with a more theoretical approach, differentiating between *formula*, which he has defined as the popular conception of fantasy as "a mass-produced wish fulfilment," and *mode*, or the ways in which fantasy examines symbols, forms, the construction of reality, mythology, and meaning (1).
2. Webster, "Tolkien and Escapist Fantasy Literature," 12.
3. Hodgeman, "John Hodgeman Interviews George R. R. Martin," n.p.
4. Bradford, "'Where Happily Ever After Happens Every Day,'" 175.
5. This dismissive attitude toward Disney, Disney's princesses, and Disney's medievalism ignores the more complicated layers of gender politics, racial politics, postmodernism, and sociological politics that infuse Disney's films. These layers and complications are thoroughly discussed and unpacked in the essays in *The Disney Middle Ages*, edited by Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein.
6. Bradford, "Disney's Princesses," 180.
7. Ibid.
8. Harrison, *Victorian Poets and the Politics of Culture*, 21.
9. Ibid., 18.
10. Catelyn Stark mentions to Brienne of Tarth that Sansa has loved stories of chivalry and romance since she was a small child (Martin, *A Clash of Kings* [1999], 785).
11. Bradford, "Disney Princesses," 180–181.
12. Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 141–142.
13. Ibid., 477.
14. Ibid., 140.
15. Ibid., 297.
16. Ibid., 472–473.
17. Ibid., 145–155.
18. Ibid., 298.
19. Ibid., 316.
20. Ibid., 473.
21. Ibid., 303.
22. Ibid., 743–744.
23. Ibid., 746.
24. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (1999), 812.

25. Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 744.
26. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (1999), 46.
27. Ibid., 487.
28. Ibid., 848.
29. Ibid., 863.
30. Ibid., 846.
31. Ibid., 50.
32. Martin, *A Storm of Swords*, 932–933.
33. Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 896.
34. Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 51.
35. Ibid.,115.
36. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (1999), 796.
37. Martin, *A Storm of Swords* (1999), 507.
38. Martin, *A Feast for Crows* (1999), 331.
39. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (1999), 797–798.
40. Martin, *A Storm of Swords* (1999), 417.
41. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (1999), 415.
42. Ibid., 285.
43. Ibid., 287.
44. Ibid. 297.
45. Ibid., 413–414.
46. Ibid., 415.
47. Ibid., 417.
48. Martin, *A Storm of Swords*, 916.
49. Ibid., 916.
50. Martin, *A Feast for Crows*, 337.
51. Ibid., 571.
52. Ibid., 958.
53. Martin, *A Dance with Dragons*, 693.
54. For example, in an interview with Dornan T. Schindler, Martin claimed, "I'm a huge fan of Tolkien, but some of the things he did very well, in lesser hands, the hands of his imitators, have become terrible weights on the field of fantasy." Schindler, "*PW* Talks with George R. R. Martin," 37.
55. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories" (2006), 151.
56. Ibid., 130.
57. Flieger, *A Question of Time*, 3.
58. At the 2014 International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, I presented a paper that questioned placement of *A Song of Ice and Fire* in the fantasy genre at all, given that Martin's motivations and aesthetic

are purposefully at odds with the traditional goal of fantasy—to provide an escape from the problems of the real world, or at least a lens through which to view the real that allows a comfortable distance between the reader and the world.

Chapter 4

Grim and Grimdark

Gillian Polack

Long before Tolkien dreamed of Middle-earth, audiences in the Middle Ages loved the *chansons de geste*, medieval epics of glory or of doom. After Tolkien, as the first chapter of this volume points out, came vast numbers of epic fantasies, also stories of glory and of doom. In several important ways, these two types of tales filled similar cultural niches for the societies that were entertained by them. This chapter considers such tales in examining one Old French epic legend, *Raoul de Cambrai* (ca. 1100–1200), and one epic fantasy, Joe Abercrombie's *The Heroes* (2012). *Raoul de Cambrai* is the story of a hero whose life goes badly wrong when he suffers a perceived injustice and who ends by destroying everything he holds dear. *The Heroes* is the story of a group of soldiers holding a hillside, just a small part of a war that has become their lives. Both are located on the dark end of the spectrum, and both effectively stand alone as narratives while incorporating links with wider narratives.

Highlighting the similarities and differences in storytelling over time helps illuminate the nature of modern epic narrative. This chapter examines the specific techniques that each work uses to build the tension and darkness for which both tales are famous. The modern is compared with the medieval by examining how each tale achieves tension, what level of characterization is important and how that level is achieved, and the role of place, of honor, of loyalty in each story. This study highlights some of the fundamental differences between medieval and modern epic narratives. In addition, the introduction of the "grimdark" into fantasy by authors such as Abercrombie is contextualized through a comparison with one of the darkest epics of the Old French repertoire.

Narratives occupy particular cultural niches. They are part of wider webs that inform people about attitudes and expectations. Analyzing two specific narratives that are as close as possible to cultural analogs though from quite different societies helps one understand the continuities in culture and the differences. It is impossible to know what audiences thought in the Middle Ages and quite difficult to unveil what they think today, but one can discover through how the tales are told the commonalities in two works that occupy similar cultural niches and thus achieve a better understanding of the cultures to which they belong. Understanding and comparing the two narratives under scrutiny in this chapter facilitates better comprehension of similarities and differences in the aesthetics of the societies that produced them.

RAOUL DE CAMBRAI: AN OVERVIEW

Raoul de Cambrai is a *chanson de geste*—that is, an Old French epic poem. The *chansons de geste* were at their most popular from the twelfth to the fourteenth century in France and England. During this period what has survived of such poems was written down, but there was considerable argument until quite recently concerning their possible oral origins.[1] They are quite different in form and structure from classical epics and

from Icelandic sagas. The *chanson de geste* is distinctly French and English and was generally written in Old French.

Even when the form does not translate into other medieval languages, however, the themes do, and there are stories based on *chanson de geste* tales in many European languages. Their influence is vast and continuing. The discussion of them here is specifically concerned, however, with the corpus of northern French and English works written in Old French.

There are four main ways of describing *chansons de geste*. (1) By poetic style—with decasyllabic lines, dodecasyllables, or alexandrines, in prose adaptation; in verse or assonance. *Raoul de Cambrai* is written partly in verse and partly assonance and is decasyllabic. It uses the classic *chanson de geste* form of the *laisse* rather than regular stanzas. (2) By the cycle in which it belongs—that is to say, by content shared with or related to that in other *chansons de geste*. There are, for example, Crusade themes, stories that include Charlemagne or his followers, and content that relates to feuding barons. These cycles are not predefined and have been described differently in different contexts. The best-known standard classification from the Middle Ages is that described by Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, in which the epics are divided into the *geste du roi* (stories of the kings of France, the cycle based on Charlemagne and his heroes), the William cycle (described as that of Garin de Monglane, but the central hero is William of Orange), and that of Doon de Mayence, which is a cycle about treachery and rebellion. It is in this final cycle that *Raoul de Cambrai* may be roughly considered to fall.[2] (3) By key characters who appear in a series of *chansons de geste*, or by a main character such as William, Aymeri, Vivien. In the case of *Raoul de Cambrai*, the poem is generally known by the name of its main character. (4) By battle—for instance, Aliscans. This is an ambiguous classification and is mainly used by scholars as a reference system for works within a cycle or centered around a certain character. The *Bataille Loquifer* is named after a person, for instance, and *Aliscans* is also *Vivien*. This is a rarer grouping, and *Raoul de Cambrai* does not fit into it. These classifications are fluid. Some *chansons de geste*

(such as *La prise d'Orange*) are lighter in tone and contain romance. They contrast sharply with the grim epics of feuding families, of which *Raoul de Cambrai* is one.[3] The genre boundaries are not fixed.

Chansons de geste tend to be interested in issues related to France, whether it be maintenance of its borders (e.g., *La chanson de Roland*), of its government (e.g., *Le couronnement de Louis*), or the states of its magnates (e.g., the feuding epics; the Crusade epics, which trace French leaders on Crusade). This is true even of those epics that are mostly known through English (Anglo-Norman) versions, such as the *Chançun de Willame*. Most *chansons de geste* have a kernel of verifiable history. The stories of William, for instance, lead back to William of Toulouse (fl. 790), cousin of Charlemagne. The *Moniage Guillame*, where William founds a monastery in order to retire, although his adventures change rather than halt, links to the real monastery founded at Gellone (Cloetta, v. 2, 1). *Raoul de Cambrai* is based on events from the ninth or tenth century.

Raoul de Cambrai is one of the finest literary examples of the genre. It concerns the tragic consequences of inheritance decisions. In terms of when it was written, it is not far removed from the Magna Carta and was definitely known when the English barons revolted under Simon de Montfort and the "Mad Parliament" sat at Oxford, for one of the surviving manuscripts (BN fr. 2493) dates from between the end of the twelfth century and the middle of the thirteenth and was written in a dialect of northwest France. English links with France were still strong at that point in time, as the activities of the de Montfort family in both countries attest. The poem's themes of distrust between king and lord and of subsequent destruction reflect the time of its greatest popularity. *Raoul de Cambrai* does not, however, survive in many manuscripts: it is extant only in one entire copy of the work, although there are also fragments. Its popularity can be determined, however, by looking at the number of times Raoul de Cambrai, the protagonist of the poem, is mentioned in a range of literature.[4] The story is straightforward. Raoul's traditional lands have been given to another, with the promise of lands in due course. When

the Vermandois lands (the logical lands for him, despite there being four Vermandois sons) are not given to him, he swears revenge and takes to the battlefield. His best friend, Bernier, is from the Vermandois side, but backs Raoul right until the moment Raoul, in his frenzy of revenge, burns Bernier's mother alive.

Abercrombie and the Grimdark

Joe Abercrombie has been labeled the reigning lord of the writing of the grimdark fantasy, a subgenre that has particular elements of darkness and battle. He is, in fact, the writer most associated with the term. It is important to explore, therefore, Abercrombie's grimdark. The term *grimdark* is generally believed to have been coined in reference to the package description of the tabletop war game *Warhammer 40,000*, part of a game universe developed by Black Library. Because of its use across gaming and fiction, the term became a descriptor of certain fantasy novels. Essentially, it is gritty fantasy, where edginess overwhelms happier elements; high levels of violence and emphasis on the dirtiness—both physical and moral—of the characters and world are defining features.

Of Farah Mendlesohn's four categories of fantasy novels—portal-quest, immersive, intrusion, and liminal—Abercrombie technically writes immersive: the reader is in the world of his novel.[5] That world is functional, albeit violent and dangerous. Abercrombie, however, breaks this immersion by adding obvious intrusions from the readers' universe, so the immersion is not complete. For instance, along with each chapter title is a quote from a writer, including include Bertolt Brecht, Montesquieu, and Will Rogers. These intrusions help establish the frame of the fantasy by giving it a clear relationship to today's world: the audience is regularly reminded of the boundaries of the narrative. Abercrombie's grimdark incorporates, therefore, a pointed link to the world of the reader. The technique also helps to establish that the fantasy is not intended to be completely mimetic: the insinuation of the modern world into the fantasy world of the novel reminds readers that the world of the novel

is fictional. These reminders are not typical of immersive fantasy. Apart from these intrusions, however, the world of the novel is complete in itself. The reader is steeped in its reality. There is no portal to either a fairy realm or today's world as, for instance, there is in Jennifer Fallon's Tide Lords books and many other series. The physical laws of Abercrombie's universe are consistent, and the social norms are demanding.

One of the reasons for the grimdark definition is the type of mimesis that Abercrombie has chosen for his tale. If it were a western (and Abercrombie used certain conventions common in the western in his novel *The Blade Itself*), it would be described as gritty; if it were a detective novel, it would be noir: Abercrombie's book privileges the gloomy and the rough and presents an environment where masculinities dominate. It is not the unredeemable blackness of the far end of horror; it is merely dark and gritty and rough. Mendlesohn has suggested that fantasy relies on a moral universe; however, grimdark fantasy suggests that human beings are not necessarily moral and that there are consequences to this.[6]

GRIM AND GRIMDARK

The suggestion of a universe that is not moral is the reason it is interesting to compare *The Heroes* with *Raoul de Cambrai*, for *Raoul de Cambrai* also assumes imperfect humans and explores consequences and lies on the gloomy end of the spectrum for *chansons de geste*. Both are stand-alone works that nevertheless have links to others—in the case of *The Heroes*, the universe of Abercrombie's other novels is a shared one. The story in *Raoul de Cambrai* follows the trail of Raoul as he searches for justice. In the denouement, two warring clans are reconciled after a judicial duel, but the destruction of Raoul's rampage remains.[7] In *The Heroes*, readers follow the line of the war itself (several characters serve as focal points) until a natural pause is reached. At the end, there is a cessation of war, but again the trail of destruction remains.

Walter J. Ong describes plot sequencing thus:

> An ascending action builds tension, rising to a climactic point, which consists often of a recognition or other incident bringing about a *peripeteia* or reversal of action, and which is followed by a denouement or untying—for this standard climactic linear plot has been likened to the tying and untying of a knot.[8]

Although both *Raoul de Cambrai* and *The Heroes* follow this pattern overall, they also undermine it. In both stories it is very clear that the denouement is not forever, that it is not complete, that it cannot resolve the underlying problems that caused the complications the stories address. This is one reason Abercrombie is often described as a grimdark writer[9]—in his universe there is no happy ending. In the world of the vendetta epic, likewise, there is no happy ending, and the best outcome is truce and temporary resolution. The similarity in how both works treat the fundaments of the story structure is particularly important to this chapter because it allows one to compare these stories despite their very different cultural contexts and the vast separation between them in time and language.

Raoul de Cambrai has a straightforward plot. Something goes wrong —Raoul feels that he has been disinherited—and the rest of the story shows how wrong can turn into impossibly wrong and then descend into something that will break a society in two. In a way *The Heroes* is equally simple: it relates the defense of a hilltop and the politics that surrounds it. The plot in this case is, however, chiefly a tool for demonstrating the decisions that people make under stress. That this is a potential reading of Raoul de Cambrai is interesting: he, too, makes decisions under stress, and it is the impact of these decisions that the plot unravels.

Both tales, really, are character studies based on the contexts in which those people live. *The Heroes* centers on the small band that takes and defends the hill known as the Heroes (for the stone circle at its peak), and as the story unwinds, it becomes increasingly obvious that the past wars have shaped them, that they are caught up in as much of a mess

and as dysfunctional a society as Raoul is. Society is not a neutral player in the development of lives: both works are political.

This one central similarity can be balanced by a vast number of differences. One of the key cultural contexts of any tale is how it is heard or read. *Raoul de Cambrai* is the product of scribal culture. Every copy was handwritten. Survivals are rare. Each version is unique. It takes from and lends its story to other stories and fits into a wider web of *chansons de geste*, with cross-checks and references to outside culture, but each and every version also stands alone. Abercrombie's novels are printed in vast quantities. They are, in fact, at the end of the publishing spectrum opposite *Raoul de Cambrai*, reflecting the significant shifts that have taken place in book culture and printing technology since the Middle Ages. Internally, they also refer to prominent figures from the world of the text (i.e., they name check) and connect with a wider cultural context, but each copy is identical to the next within a given market and even perhaps across markets, depending on editing decisions for different imprints. Where readers or listeners—for *Raoul de Cambrai* was written for listening as much as or more than for reading[10]—share the same words and narration with Raoul, they share the same story, but with variations that range from the subtle to the significant. The difference between a story delivered in a manuscript culture and one delivered in a print culture is not small.

Both, however, as I have intimated, include name checking and links to other works and to the wider culture of their times through overt cultural references—they both collaborate with the audience in similar ways in this regard. These features are key aspects of both texts: they help bring the world of the novel and that of the poem alive. *Raoul de Cambrai* uses as part of its raft of name checks many religious elements, reflecting the religious underpinning of medieval society. For example, lines 65–66 read, "May God the Lord, Whose Judgement Day is nigh / Guard and protect his bishop here in Christ!"[11] This is a sentiment common to epic legends and, indeed, to medieval literature in general. It reflects popular

devotion, honor given to specific groups, localities (for each region has its distinctive saints and cult) and so on.[12] The references to religion bring the world of the story alongside the world of the audience, for they share the devotion. Recognition brings affiliation.

Abercrombie's equivalent takes readers right outside the world of the novel but provides the same sense of affiliation. The novel refers to other literature and popular culture throughout by, as discussed earlier, including quotes at the beginning of each chapter. Another way this is done is by giving the soldiers familiar ranks—general, major, colonel and so on—and often nicknames such as Black Dow and his offsider Wonderful, or Red-Hat and the Dogman. Both narratives, therefore, can be defined by their relationship with other narratives and with the world that the audience would expect to share. The technical aspects of narrative are, however, equally interesting.

One of the most fascinating technical aspects of both narratives is the way in which time is focused and shaped for the audience. In a classic *chanson de geste* such as *Raoul de Cambrai*, plot lines are mainly linear; this is also true of Abercrombie's work. The chief challenges to linearity in Abercrombie are flashbacks and scenes that echo earlier scenes. *The Heroes* is rich in the latter, for one of the motifs that hold the novel together comprises conversations held in and around the circle of standing stones after which the novel is named.

One of the distinctive poetic elements of the *chanson de geste* as a genre is the *laisse similaire*, a series of repetitions (one repetition for each *laisse*, or irregular stanza) of a crucial event that reinforces and focuses attention upon key aspects. The *laisse similaire* is a structure requiring at least two full stanzas.[13] These stanzas should have a very close correspondence—that is, the content should be repetitive. The repetition heightens the tension, while the accumulation of detail and the delaying of the climax through this repetition only add to this effect. Time becomes concentrated. Every moment both during the repetition and immediately after it becomes more intense. This departure from the

normal pace of the tale gives the audience tools for interpreting the story. Whether it reminds one that the participants in these conversations are the real heroes in the war or whether it points to the coming of resolution, the handling of time through these narrative devices is key to shaping the wider narrative.

This technique, which can be termed *epic time*,[14] slows time and charges the atmosphere with significance, much as the quiet conversations in *The Heroes* do. The best-known sequence of *laisses* in the *chanson de geste* tradition is Roland's death scene in *La chanson de Roland*, but it appears as a narrative device throughout the genre. In *Raoul de Cambrai* it is used to highlight the emotional elements of the poem, by showing Raoul's mother's view and anger, which contrast sharply with Bernier's mother's death elsewhere.[15] This demonstrates very clearly that the focus of the *chanson de geste* is on the character of Raoul and on the way his need for personal justice and the land of his ancestors destroys the world around him. Abercrombie's work contains no exact equivalent of the *laisse similaire*, although the internal monologues of Colonel Bremer dan Gorst come close to filling the same function. His monologues explain events and present his reactions to events and to people. They are consistent with his internal development as a person, however, rather than with the wider emotional burden of the tale.

Conversations are also common in *chansons de geste* and fantasy novels as a narrative technique. In this respect, closer parallels are found between the two texts. In *The Heroes*, conversations are used to intensify mood and to slow the narrative. In fact, they give the same focus that the *laisses similaires* do when Raoul's mother remonstrates with her son—that is to say, they focus the action on the crucial element. In this case, a series of conversations held at the top of the hill by the band of defenders (these conversations are spread throughout the novel) focuses the emotional impact on them and their fate and undermines the importance of the big politics below the hill and elsewhere. These conversations not only highlight dramatic moments, but they help the reader interpret them;

just as with the series of *laisses* in which Ernaut pleads with Raoul for his life, in these conversations the audience is alerted to the importance of his plea through the writer's use of the *laisse similaire*.[16]

The Role of Families and Inheritance

Lineage and family solidarity were of key importance in the social structure of the High Middle Ages.[17] R. Howard Bloch underscored this when he explained that a linear and continuous model of inheritance serves to define a linear textual mode.[18] Family and lineage underpin the plot of *Raoul de Cambrai*. In the epic, however, the straight narrative economy that is equivalent to and even synonymous with lineage is problematized, primarily through repetition. The repetition of geographic and climatic formulas, catalogs of families, arms, and armies, rhetorical questions, and even whole *laisses* serves to slow the pace of narration in order to threaten the progression both of text and of lineal family.

I have already mentioned one result of this: the intensifying of mood. Another consequence is, however, far more central. *Raoul de Cambrai* is a story about lineage. It has at its heart one of the most contentious issues during the period of its writing: whether father-son inheritance is proper. Raoul contends that it is. The king, however, holds the other view, that Raoul will receive a suitable inheritance at an appropriate time and that land is his, as ruler, to dispose of.[19] The question of inheritance is based, therefore, on a presumption of the nature of ownership. At the heart of medieval France, in an idealized world where feudalism might exist, the land is held in trust from God and passed down. There is no absolute ownership. Yet feudalism is a construct to help explain social structure, and it is not the reality that occurred, as Susan Reynolds has argued.[20] *Raoul de Cambrai* demonstrates this tension very nicely. At the heart of the story is Raoul's sense of what he is owed as his family inheritance, and he believes so very strongly that he is due his family possessions that he will turn society upside down to obtain them. This

is not the perfect feudal society. It corresponds far more closely to the unclear situation that Reynolds's study discusses.

Abercrombie's novel presents, however, a more idealized society. Despite its tag of grimdark, the novel questions literary models of societal values far less than the medieval poem does. The disowned prince must prove himself in battle, but he then receives his rewards, and they are his family's inheritance. The lineage is challenged because of his character, not because there are fundamental doubts concerning the nature of the society. Abercrombie has created a violent world, but his grimdark does not question the underlying verities as *Raoul de Cambrai* does. Abercrombie's grimdark is, in this way, far less grim and far less dark than the nightmare situation in which Raoul's allies find themselves.

Raoul de Cambrai does not exist in isolation. It is extant in few surviving manuscripts, but as noted, other stories refer to it and draw from it. The most important of these stories is the Mez sequence. *Yon*, in fact, weaves a portion of Raoul's story into its own. Thus, the deep uncertainty about who can inherit what accrues profound narrative importance within medieval literature. The literary construction of lineage was very important in the wider French and English culture in which *Raoul de Cambrai* emerged. The echoes of *Raoul de Cambrai* reflect wider concerns that society had about the nature of inheritance, but they also reflect this focus on lineage and ancestry. Raoul's anger is not only about property—it is also about acknowledging the place that he holds as heir in his family. The denial of property rights was a denial of the value of the family.

The role of the family heir is important in *The Heroes*. The unvalued prince comes into his own and wins his right to inheritance through what happens in the book. The similarity is only superficial, however. The initial failure of the prince in *The Heroes* means that he is mocked and treated badly, but this is because of the personal way his cowardice is perceived. There is no resulting devaluation of the family: the link between the personal and the family exists, but it is not profound.

Land and People

The relationship that characters and story have with the land is also noteworthy. Fundamental to both tales are the questions who owns the land and how one gains and maintains control over it. In *Raoul de Cambrai*, Raoul objects to his "ancestral" land being disposed of, rather than being held in trust until he is ready to take on the responsibility. This is important—as I have shown—in relation to power and to lineage. The land and the lord's relationship to it form an intrinsic aspect of both these things in *Raoul de Cambrai*. This is why although technically he is not being disinherited, Raoul sees himself as being treated badly. His honor (personal and family, for they cannot be separated) belongs with the land. Despite this, he shows no respect for that land when he ravages it. The equations are not simple, nor are they obvious. What *Raoul de Cambrai* offers is a consistent and terrifying test of the principles of feudal land tenure, in which land is held in trust from one's lord and, through him, ultimately from God. Raoul disputes the nature of the lord's decisions and argues for personal ownership, through his family. As a result, people die and crops are destroyed. The protection that the lord is supposed to give his land is turned upside down and inside out. The ultimate lesson of the story reflects the way peace can be restored, what it takes, and how difficult it is.

The Heroes leads with war and ends with the expectation of another war. Peace is a temporary state: there will always be war somewhere. The characters play out their lives against that backdrop. They win battles and lose lives and suffer great hurt, but the big picture is not the land and its care. The battles are fought for land, but the land is almost always simply underfoot. The big emotional driver in *Raoul de Cambrai* of what constitutes ownership and entitlement is largely absent from Abercrombie's novel. When it does appear, it relates more to command—when the prince takes his place as the king's heir—than to the importance of land in lineage and rule. This underlines the vast cultural differences between the two stories.

Another key (related) difference is the role that ordinary people play. Because in *The Heroes* land tenure is much less important than in the older text, the focus turns to those affected by the tactical decisions of war, to the ordinary folk. Because in *Raoul de Cambrai* the experience of Raoul is so closely linked to the big issues the story explores, there is little to no interest in the thoughts of the less noble parts of the population. This is reinforced in each narrative by the basic narrative style. *Chansons de geste* do not allow for much in the way of internal reflection or of detailed characterization for more than a few key characters. The gentle pace of the modern prose novel, however grimdark, allows for conversations, private thought, and even (as in the case of Bremer dan Gorst) lengthy thoughts during momentary pauses in speech. This also illuminates differences of time in the tales. The external narrative in *Raoul de Cambrai* sets up quite a different pace from the combination of external action narrative sandwiched between large chunks of more internal, reflective narrative. Time in narrative, of course, is not that simple.

History and Time

Neither work is set in the world of its audience. *Raoul de Cambrai* is set in the past. *The Heroes* is set in the present of another Earth, one that bears some relationship to the past of today's world. The past can, however, be many different things. It can be a fantasy escape (a particularly violent one, in these circumstances), an ideal world, a model of the present, a place to test the present (as seen in *Raoul de Cambrai*, in which different views of land are tested on the battlefield), religious teaching (another form of modeling for the present—not one that appears in either of these works), presentation of "facts" (that is, setting up a relationship with the present), justification for current status, and the past purely as memory. Most of these frameworks do not apply to narratives such as either of these. *Raoul de Cambrai* is more about issues in present society from the time the *chanson de geste* was set than it is about any past that is not semimythical. This brings it closer to the purely invented past of

The Heroes than is immediate obvious. Both works are stories for the present in which the writers lived.

Without knowing the authors' intent, it is difficult to assess how moral the narratives are supposed to be. However, both works shift action into the realm of the semimythical. The violence, its causes, and its continuation are very much the stuff of epics. This is the focus of the past in both stories. It is about the longer game, the larger patterns. This is the broad sweep of time in which the narrative techniques nest. It is the time of the tale, and it informs every event, every conversation, and every nuance within the tale. These nuances include the slowing of the *laisse similaire* in *Raoul de Cambrai* and the conversations between the standing stones in *The Heroes*. They include the focus of the battle scenes and the validation of events when they are summarized, for instance, in the letters sent to the king by dan Gorst. Cross-referencing within a tale and to objects outside the tale also validates the events of the tale and reinforces its role as a semimythical invented past.

Both works illustrate the poetic shaping of history. History, to be clear, is not the past but a cultural narrative that explains the past. Fantasy conventions and tales of a bitter feuding past are both ways in which one's understanding of history is shaped and a relationship with the past developed.[21] These tales give the semimythical time and place its value, bringing the setting to life and infusing it with significance. The special focus on these moments helps ratify the larger narrative—in other words, the various writing techniques used do not simply nest within the framework of the narrative; they reinforce it.

Using motifs that the audience links to the past helps connect these nested techniques with the semimythical world of the novel and of the *chanson de geste*. Names can be very evocative. Homer and Virgil are usually mentioned in twelfth-century historic narratives, for instance, when a sense of distant time is required.[22] They can explain the story to the reader by bringing in outside stories, by providing instant contexts.

Raoul de Cambrai refers to Adam and Eve in a typical reference. Where reference is made to biblical characters in this work, it is done in a way that affirms their higher validity. It is generally "God who..." did something in relation to these figures (in the current instance, God who blessed Adam and Eve). Biblical figures affirmed by God both give historical authenticity to the narrative and push the sense of higher meaning. Some types of validation within a story are not purely historical and do not simply affirm the reality of the narrative world; they can also validate emotional values and religious values and thus reinforce the tale's significance. In the case of *Raoul de Cambrai*, this has particular importance for the two systems in conflict: the nature of inheritance and of society and the disastrous effects that arise when those are not clear are reinforced by something as apparently simple as the internal naming system.

The Heroes uses names in two rather interesting ways. First, some characters are given names of European origin or that sound as if they could be European: Colonel Felnigg, for instance, and General Jalenhorm and First Sergeant Forest. This underpins the presentation of the Heroes themselves as European megaliths. The past of the characters in the novel is overtly linked to readers' past: as already seen, the fiction is not hidden, and the storytelling celebrates the attribution. *The Heroes* celebrates its fictionality through these devices, just as *Raoul de Cambrai* links to the accepted history of France. One undermines while the other underpins: names are important. They illuminate the organizing principles of each text by demonstrating the choices each author has made in order to link the outside world with the story and, in fact, to demonstrate which outside world the text is referring to. They help the audience determine how to approach the story.

Stephen Nichols has suggested just how important these factors are when brought together. He has argued that "all available evidence suggests that the *poetic* accounts of Charlemagne's battle in the Pyrenees shaped the twelfth-century awareness of the historical fact rather than the other way around."[23] *Raoul de Cambrai* shaped the medieval French view of

its own past, and Abercrombie's careful disavowal of historicity through his naming practices helps remind audiences that any deeper truths within the novel are not actually historical in nature. Abercrombie's historical world reflects assumed history and has strong links with readers' understanding of how war may work and how people act in times of strife, but at the same time, Abercrombie has ensured that any such interpretation is made in error.

Whereas *Raoul de Cambrai* points to the larger background, *The Heroes* points to the story. Both suggest histories in which "facts" about the past are less important than the stories are. Thus, these different indicators are key to understanding the most crucial difference between the two works: one depicts a world that is supposed to be historical and real and the other does not. Whether audiences accept these indicators in this way is another question and a much harder one to answer.

At this point, there are no answers. I have established some equivalencies between two narratives written for vastly different cultures, but a chapter of this length cannot be more than exploratory. This chapter demonstrates that these equivalencies are useful to explore and that narrative structures and certain aspects of the world a writer builds for the narrative (naming conventions, for instance) make it possible to examine quite different narratives together. What these stories mean to their authors and to their audiences and what the equivalent wider cultural impact is likely to be for each tale is a subject for a much larger study.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Duggan, *The "Song of Roland"*; Rychner, *La chansons de geste.*
2. In the opening lines of Bertrand de Bar sur Aube's *Girart de Vienne* (see Newth's translation). Although translations are generally referred to in this chapter in the interest of accessibility, both translations and original-language editions are given in the bibliography.
3. A good introduction to the *geste des Loherens*, or Mez cycle of *chansons de geste*, which is also the best overview of the grimmer end of the *chanson de geste* spectrum, can be found in Bowman, *The Connection of the Geste des Loherens.*
4. Meyer and Longnon, *Raoul de Cambrai*, xl–liii.
5. Immersive fantasy is "set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world." Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 59. Mendlesohn has outlined the other categories as follows: in a portal-quest fantasy, "a character leaves her familiar surroundings and passes through a portal into an unknown place" (1); in an intrusion fantasy, "the world is ruptured by the intrusion, which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled" (115); and liminal is "that form of fantasy which estranges the reader from the fantastic as seen and described by the protagonist" (183).
6. Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 5.
7. A closer study of this can be found in Eisner, "Raoul de Cambrai."
8. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 142.
9. And indeed, he describes himself this way. His Twitter handle is "Lord Grimdark."
10. The key study of this is Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public.*
11. Newth, *The Song of Girart of Vienne*, 188
12. Belanger, *Damedieus*, 64.
13. Rychner, *La chanson de geste*, 100; see page 96 and following for a closer study of the form.
14. Discussed as epic time in Polack, "Conceptions of Sectors."
15. From line 826, Newth, *The Song of Girart of Vienne*, 208ff.
16. From line 2828, ibid., 261.
17. Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, 86–87.
18. Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 103.

19. White, "The Discourse of Inheritance" examines this in more detail.
20. See Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals* for the traditional historical view of the Middle Ages and the issues that arise when equating it with, for instance, tenure patterns.
21. Polack explored this in more depth and in relation to modern speculative fiction and historical fiction in "Novelists and Their History."
22. Polack, *Conceptions of Sectors*.
23. Nichols, "Poetic Reality," 25.

Chapter 5

"Our Minds Are in the Gutter, But Some of Us Are Watching Starz..."

Sex, Violence, and Dirty Medievalism

Andrew B. R. Elliott

In a 2011 *Yahoo!* review of the medieval television series *Game of Thrones* (2011–), *The Borgias* (2011–2013), and *Camelot* (2011), online reviewer Elizabeth Periale proposed—albeit in a throwaway line—that all three series offer a "sexy blueprint: start with a dash of intrigue, add some blood and gore, and then throw in as much sex as you can fit into an episode."[1] Indeed, for a medievalist surveying the popular-cultural landscape, this would appear to be an accusation with some merit: whether it be the blood and nudity of Starz's *Camelot*, the bedroom power plays of Showtime's *The Borgias*, or the violence and (problematic) sexual politics of HBO's *Game of Thrones*, in the era of cable television the Middle Ages are often characterized by a seemingly formulaic obsession with sex, violence, power, and dirtiness. Even those series that are less extreme in their adult

content, such as *The Pillars of the Earth* (2010) and the History Channel's *Vikings* (2013–), by no means constitute family-friendly television.

However, this chapter addresses the question of a formulaic depiction of violence implicit in Periale's comment inasmuch as it suggests a more widespread assertion that there is perhaps something inherent to medieval-themed television that draws producers to such adult content. One immediate issue that arises concerns the temptation to view medievalism in popular culture as a genre or subgenre in itself. Although the more egregious, headline-grabbing examples of rape and sexual violence in medievalesque series like *Game of Thrones* and *Camelot* might suggest that graphic content is more prevalent in fantasy depictions of the past, such assumptions about genre are in fact misleading—not only because a concept like genre is problematic in itself when it comes to medieval-themed television, but also because fantasy remakes of the Middle Ages are by no means easily classified or even identified as one single category, as other chapters in this volume attest. Indeed, a like-for-like comparison with *The Tudors*, *The Borgias*, or *Vikings* reveals that both fantasy and more traditionally historical versions of the Middle Ages on television are also dominated, to a greater or lesser extent, by sexual or violent content. As discussed later, my suggestion here is that genre is no guarantee of content but instead acts to frame the *kind* of Middle Ages on offer. That the fantasy worlds depicted in *Game of Thrones* and *Camelot* are mired in as much adult content as the historically rooted world of Kingsbridge in *The Pillars of the Earth* and *The Borgias*' Rome are, coupled with the frequency of explicit scenes of rape, incest, and bloody violence in all four, suggests not that genre is the key to understanding the shift toward adult content but that this shift owes to something else. My suggestion, discussed in the final part of this chapter, is that the key lies rather in the popular reception of the medieval period itself, which seemingly invites the kind of squalor famously lampooned in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. It seems, on the surface, that the term *medieval* has come to hold the same kind of warning as a parental advisory sticker; rather than functioning as an ad hoc genre marker, medieval settings

serve as a warning that it is time to put the children to bed and brace oneself for some gratuitous, explicit adult content.

Nevertheless, before getting too carried away by Periale's assumptions, it is worth pausing to consider the implications of her assertion, for it does risk marking a return to the rather reductive excesses of structuralism or formalism that medievalism has shaken off after a struggle that began only recently. The existence of such a sexy blueprint, if proved, would prompt a range of other questions that are themselves equally problematic. To take just a handful of these queries, if it is true that the twenty-first century has seen a preference for gritty, dirty medieval worlds, how are these different from what, almost four decades ago, Umberto Eco termed "shaggy" medievalism, which constitutes a general celebration of "virile, brute force"?[2] If they are indeed the same worlds, and this particular one of Eco's ten little Middle Ages is simply the current favorite, why have audiences turned to this one and not others? And why turn to it *now*?

Furthermore, looking more broadly at the popular-cultural Middle Ages as a function of reception (and not of genre) raises further questions. Are these violent worlds a reaction to (and negation of) earlier sanitized versions of the period, or are they holding up a dark mirror to today's violent societies? Are they reacting to the established genre conventions of, say, MGM's sanitized medieval worlds of the 1950s? Or is there, perhaps, a sense in which the explosion of factual historical television over the last decade[3] has caused fictional and fantasy medieval TV series to follow suit, exploring the darker, grittier aspects of the Middle Ages? It is also important to recognize that the context of production will also play a major role in dictating what content is permissible: for instance, why are cable channels in particular criticized for their dirty medievalism, as opposed to the BBC's return to the merrie olde England of yore with Tiger Aspect/BBC's *Robin Hood* (2006–2009) and Shine's *Merlin* (2008–2012)? Finally, is this blood and gore unique to the Middle Ages, or can it be linked to wider trends in historical television, such as *Deadwood*, *The Tudors*, *Spartacus: Blood and Sand*, and *Rome*?

Thus, although not intended as a scholarly gesture, Periale's suggestion of a formulaic process by which one conjures up the Middle Ages after Tolkien does require serious scholarly analysis given the range and importance of questions it raises. This chapter, accordingly, examines the existence of a new, dirty kind of medievalism using two medieval television series in particular, Starz's *Camelot* and *The Pillars of the Earth*, as examples. I argue that although there is indeed a preponderance of dirtiness in televisual Middle Ages that is symptomatic of Eco's shaggy medievalism, its frequency does not necessarily reflect a wholesale shift to adult content but instead represents a fragmentation into increasingly niche—and carefully targeted—audiences; thus, only some of the medieval worlds on offer are shaggy. Therefore, the industry's response to popular medievalism has been to make more historical television overall, each manifestation with a specific and carefully researched target demographic in mind.

THE SEXY BLUEPRINT OF MEDIEVAL TELEVISION

The first issue is to demonstrate that there is indeed a kind of sexy blueprint—a formulaic depiction of brutality, dirtiness, sex, or violence—at work in television's invocations of the medieval world. Such a claim, examined more closely, masks two claims as one: first, that the extent and nature of gratuitous content in medieval television has grown over time; second, that such explicit content is considered to be part of a standard formula adopted either consciously or unconsciously by television producers.

The first of these claims is relatively uncontroversial, as anyone who has ever watched the plethora of medieval-themed television series over the past decade knows only too well. My two case studies, *Camelot* and *The Pillars of the Earth*, are both characterized—albeit to varying degrees, as I shall discuss—by generally dark, violent, and ribald medieval worlds that reflect Thomas Hobbes's (misquoted) dictum that medieval life was nasty, brutish, and short. Even from the very first introduction of

Arthur, *Camelot* operates in some ways as a reversal of many traditional Arthurian settings; the first sight of the future king comes from a low crane shot that steadily moves in over a babbling brook to frame two blonde, naked figures at the center of the screen. In a scene that could have been conceived by Frank Dicksee, the couple occupies the central third of the frame on a lush bed of grass sandwiched between blue water and blue sky—a verdant island of peace and tranquility in a world of cold blue violence. Before the camera cuts away from the establishing shot, viewers hear a playful form of a Latin lesson in which Arthur recites Genesis 1:1 while admiring a girl's naked body in what he calls an act of pious worship; the shot changes to show a naked Arthur "worshipping" a topless girl who has no long, Pre-Raphaelite hair to conceal her nudity.

The tranquility of the tryst is, however, suddenly ruptured in a style characteristic of the series' approach to the Arthurian legend, which constructs believable medieval worlds only to undermine them in the next frame. Here the Pre-Raphaelite Arthurian world is ruptured by the offscreen appearance of Kay, signaled by Arthur's suddenly looking guiltily up and out of the frame. Kay's angry outburst reveals that the girl, Anna, is not in fact Arthur's courtly paramour but Kay's lover, who has proved irresistible to the philandering future king. As the two brothers and Anna engage in a farcical mock-fight—whose seriousness is undermined by the fact that only one of the three is fully clothed—again the characterization is contained within one short scene that from the outset pits family members against one another, foreshadowing Camelot's downfall through Arthur's recklessness and the breakdown of familial or dynastic harmony.

Thus, even in the pilot it is clear that an identifiable aesthetic has already been set in motion throughout *Camelot*. Yet as the episode, and indeed the series, progresses, viewers witness more and more instances of full-frontal nudity (of both men and women), unchecked and bloody violence, and profuse swearing. What emerges from the series is the sense that here is no fairy-tale Disney world but rather one characterized by

violence and sex. Whether one inhabits the dark, shadowy, interior world of Morgan or the brightly sunlit exterior world of Arthur, whether it is the spiritual forest of Merlin or the otherworldly waterside of Guinevere, each world wears its excess gratuitously on its sleeve through its explicit sex, violence, brutality, or nudity. It is clear, then, as *Camelot* progresses that the dark, inverted world of Arthur's court draws on popular sensibilities to Eco's shaggy medievalism—that primitive, barbaric world that rides a knife's edge between sex and death (*eros* and *thanatos*, in Sigmund Freud's configuration) and in which life is fragile and ultimately disposable.[4]

A similar sense of "shagginess" dominates my second example, *The Pillars of the Earth*, which occupies a liminal space between terrestrial and cable television. Though (unusually) produced without presold rights, it was eventually bought up in North America by a cable channel, Starz, but in the UK was broadcast by a terrestrial network, Channel 4. Whereas Starz is a subscription channel characterized by blood, gore, and explicit sexual content (it is perhaps most famous for its graphic representation of ancient Rome in *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* [2010–]), Channel 4's approach to adult content is far more ambivalent. Although Channel 4 has a long history and a brand identity as a home for challenging and controversial content,[5] as a hybrid between commercially oriented channels such as ITV or Channel 5 and the publicly funded BBC, it is nevertheless obliged to meet a range of Public Service Broadcasting requirements in the UK, which call for a more family-friendly product or at least force it to avoid broadcasting explicit content purely for shock value.[6]

In fact, even a surface reading of this second example makes plain that the two series operate on very different levels and with very clearly different thresholds of acceptability in terms of graphic sex and violence. Unlike *Camelot*, *The Pillars of the Earth* is much more prone to using cuts immediately before any violence, a technique that reduces violence and gore to suggested—rather than explicit—depictions, and cautious camera angles and lighting to imply rather than show any scenes of a sexual nature. Episode 4, for example, sees a group of William Hamleigh's

(David Oakes) soldiers rampaging through a village, and swordsmen on horseback cut down unarmed peasants in their path. The cameras are placed at ground level looking up at the cavalry, and unlike in the various battles of *Camelot*, here viewers see only the swing of the sword before a cut to the falling villagers left for dead. Even in the final showdown in which William kills Tom Builder (Rufus Sewell), the moment in which William plunges his sword into Tom is shown from a long shot, and the reaction shot consists only of a brief close-up of Tom's eyes.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Kingsbridge—the fictional town in which *The Pillars of the Earth* takes place—is by no means without its fair share of lust, incest, killing, death, war, and torture, infused with the same dangerous conflation of sex, violence, and power as *Camelot* is. The main difference, then, between the two series consists of the extent of what is or is not shown. Like *Camelot*, even from the outset, this series reflects Johan Huizinga's categorization of the Middle Ages as one dominated by the "general facility of emotions, of tears and spiritual upheavals [which show] how violent and high-strung was life at that period."[7] Within the first episode, the audience is introduced to infant exposure, sudden death through childbirth, unprovoked and vicious beatings, killing aplenty, stabbings, and incest, and in the first three episodes these dirty medievalisms are topped off by rape, torture, and domestic abuse. The milieu these characters inhabit is thus the familiar world of mud, dirt, straw, animals, and general squalor that was so expertly parodied almost forty years ago in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

The presence of a sexy blueprint is further evidenced in the reception of both series, which seems to have made little distinction between the sex and the violence on offer in these dirty medieval worlds. To use an admittedly rather crude measure, both series' DVD releases were classified with the same age rating: the British Board of Film Classification in the UK gave both a 15 rating, and both obtained a TV-MA rating in the United States, with no discrimination between their depictions of sex, violence, and nudity. Likewise, in terms of scheduling, *The Pillars*

of the Earth was broadcast on Channel 4 in the postwatershed prime-time slot of nine o'clock Saturday nights.[8] Such a decision reflects an unspoken indication that the series was intended to reach a mature but mainstream audience and targeted broadly the same demographic as, for example, the BBC's *Rome* and *The Tudors*, each of which had been scheduled in the same slot.[9] Indeed, those series were often explicitly mentioned in *Pillars*' promotional materials surrounding the premieres on both sides of the Atlantic.[10]

Equally, the comments on various Internet-user forums reveal a broad consensus best represented by the Parents Guide of the Internet Movie Database (www.IMDb.com), which declares emphatically that *Pillars* is "not for the family and deserves a rating of 'R.'"[11] Elsewhere, users of www.commonsensemedia.org have suggested rather summarily that the miniseries is "incredibly and intimately violent," characterizing its aesthetic as one dominated by a "generally dark and dreary tone."[12] Consequently, any declaration that *Pillars* is less explicit than *Camelot* is justifiable only by employing relative, not absolute, standards. Just as *The Pillars of the Earth* is less explicit than *Camelot*, the paucity of sex and violence in the former becomes noticeable only in the censored version broadcast on television rather than in the box set.[13] Furthermore, the comparative tameness of *The Pillars of the Earth* exists solely in terms of what is seen—in terms of the plot details, both series have as major narrative impetuses sex, death, murder, incest, rape, and poisoning—rather than what is suggested.

THE PROLIFERATION OF MEDIEVAL WORLDS

In this narrow definition of a hypothetical sexy blueprint, even within the restricted range of examples studied so far, it is clear that there is indeed a greater proclivity toward explicit scenes of sex, violence, and brutality in modern depictions of the Middle Ages than is apparent in their precursors and even some contemporary works, such as the BBC's *Robin Hood* and Shine's *Merlin*. Looking back to examples like ITC's

The Adventures of Sir Galahad, *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot*, and even HTC's *Robin of Sherwood* (itself by no means an innocent or wholly child-friendly series), one finds in these earlier depictions of the Middle Ages simply nowhere near the same level of sex or violence as there appears to be in *Camelot*, *The Pillars of the Earth*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Tudors*, and *The Borgias*.

If it is true, then, that historically themed medieval television series are today marked by graphic depictions of violence, sex, and physical abuse, then the question why this should be the case immediately presents itself. My suggestion is that any change in this respect is the consequence of a range of factors, including relaxation of restrictions on broadcasting graphic content, the emergence of newer cable channels, and subtle shifts in trends of representing the past that affect a viewer's "horizon of expectations."[11]

In the first instance, it is important to recognize that the assertion that medieval worlds have become more violent over time is based on false premises. It is, after all, somewhat disingenuous to compare Starz's *Camelot* with ITC serials such as *The Adventures of Sir Galahad* because they are not necessarily representative examples of the same thing. *Galahad* directly targeted the young and aimed at broad, if not universal, appeal, whereas *Camelot* was made for a presold audience of subscribers and targeted a niche audience. Moreover, my choice of these two in particular suggests that there were no equivalent images of sex, violence, and nudity in depictions of the Middle Ages from the 1960s, which is simply untrue. In the cinema, examples of dirty medievalism can be found throughout any number of films from the 1960s onward. Looking beyond the conservatism of Hollywood epics from the 1950s and 1960s, from the same period one finds no shortage of sex, violence, rape, war, slaughter, butchery, and even torture and human sacrifice in *The Vikings* (1957), *The War Lord* (1965), and *Alfred the Great* (1969), all the way through the 1970s and up to *Excalibur* (1981) and *Flesh + Blood* (1985).

Likewise, the tendency to lament the prevalence of sex and violence on television is by no means a phenomenon limited to medieval representations, but it reflects an implicit assumption of declining moral standards that fits into a broader pattern of moral panics about popular culture that have erupted periodically since at least the 1950s. To include a few examples chosen at random, the furore over films like *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and *The Wild One* (1950) is a testament to a contemporary feeling that when it came to teenagers' films, or any countercultural trends, popular culture was in a ruinous race to the bottom.[15] A range of polemics may be found from this period decrying the corrupting influence of the cinema, television, radio, rock and roll, and even comic books on the young.[16] To give an example only of the last case, Frederick Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* opens with the alarmist claim that comic books risk producing a generation of psychotically disturbed children, arguing that "the chronic stimulation, temptation and seduction by comic books ... are contributing factors to many children's maladjustment."[17] That these children were to become precisely the middle-aged baby boomers who now lament the decline of modern television is, it seems to me, evidence of the essentially alarmist (and indeed circular) nature of many such claims.

Furthermore, comparisons with Hollywood films and television made in the United States or the UK unwittingly adopt a very Anglocentric view. Looking beyond Hollywood, one finds that much of what is called (however problematically) "world cinema" reveals similarly dirty views of the Middle Ages in a range of films, including *La passion Béatrice* (1987), *Le retour de Martin Guerre* (1982), *The Virgin Spring* (1960), *Vlad Tepes* (1979), *I racconti di Canterbury* (1972), *Pathfinder* (1987), and *Blanche* (1972). Such comparisons also ignore all manner of rather unpalatable violence in the original medieval sources from which many medieval films and TV series are (however loosely) drawn.[18] The fidelity of these adaptations warrants discussion in a different study, but suffice it for my purposes to say that as the previous chapter in this collection argues, the *chansons de geste*, like *La chanson de Roland*, not to mention the fabliau

tradition, are not without their own explicit depictions of sex, rape, slaughter, brutality, and violence. What this means, then, is that all one can realistically say about the increased sex and violence in depictions of the Middle Ages is that if it does turn out to be following a sexy blueprint, then that blueprint was drawn up quite some time ago; thus, the aberration would belong to the mid-twentieth century and not to the early twenty-first.

A final issue in response to the claim that television is becoming more violent over time is that such an argument relies on an understanding of television's depictions of the past as a causal chain in which each popular-cultural product is drawn from and builds on an earlier depiction of the same period. Seen this way, the emergence of medieval-themed television is perceived as a procession that becomes more and more risqué as time goes on. Beginning in 1949 with *The Adventures of Sir Galahad*, shown in a theatrical release, it is of course possible to demonstrate a genealogical link to successive serials like Sapphire Films' *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot* (1956–1957), which clearly draws on the earlier serial in terms of aesthetic and format. Over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, however, there began to emerge more and more new entries into the genre that, by necessity, diverged from the core canon and began to develop in isolation from each other; it is worth remembering that there is no guarantee that any of the directors or writers had even seen the earlier works to which I have retrospectively compared them. To give only two examples from many, *Arthur of the Britons* (1972–1973) and *Robin of Sherwood* (1984–1986) clearly operate in very different styles and genres from each other and—having been made for very different channels and audiences—bear markedly few surface similarities, and those do not suggest any mutual influence.[19] The late 1980s and early 1990s began to show signs of even further divergence with parodies like *Maid Marian and Her Merry Men* (1989) and animated fare such as *The Big Knights* (1999), which demonstrate greater influence from other television genres than from specifically medieval settings. Furthermore, the twenty-first century was to increase the diversification of offerings

as well as their number, with well over a dozen examples of medieval television series ranging from family-oriented fare like *Robin Hood* and *Merlin*, whose chastity and restraint would easily sail through even the strictest application of the Hays Code, to the more extreme examples studied in this chapter.

To overlook the increase in number and diversity is also to ignore a fundamental change in television over the past three decades—namely, that over time more and more channels have been added, which in turn allows for more and more depictions of the medieval past as part of a broader broadcast repertoire. Taking these two factors into account, then, suggests that it is not necessarily the case that television is producing more violent medieval worlds but rather that there is *more of it to be violent in the first place*. It is worth remembering that the very impetus for Periale's review was that three medieval-themed series were being broadcast in the very same year. Thus, if there are more medieval-themed television series on offer today than ever before, it logically follows that some of these series can be extreme in their sex and violence without affecting the core middle-brow audience.

If one sees that the sexy blueprint is merely the result of a range of factors—relaxation of censorship, increased TV output, twenty-four-hour transmission, and added channels—one might ask why some of these worlds are dirty and others are not, a question that is better answered by looking at the broader media ecology in order to examine the brand identities of each channel. Instead of breaking these series down by date (this encourages the teleological approach, which makes the same claim that dirtiness is increasing over time), if one looks at a cross section of production companies and broadcasters a different—and revealing—pattern begins to emerge (see table 1).

Rather than an isolated effort to depict the medieval world on the small screen, each TV series under discussion makes more sense when viewed as part of individual channel or production strategies. Seen as one in a stable of offerings designed to capitalize on existing audience

loyalty, they emerge not as earnest attempts to document the Middle Ages but as examples of cult television viewings that are dependent on viewer loyalty rather than on mass appeal.[20] Consequently, the medieval fare on offer meshes neatly with strict categorizations of corporate-brand identities across subscription—rather than free-to-air or network—television channels. It is for this reason that *The Tudors* bears a much closer resemblance to *The Borgias* as an archetypal Showtime production than to *Merlin* and *Robin Hood* as BBC fare. Even though all three were broadcast on the BBC, the latter two were originally BBC productions made for a BBC1 audience, whereas *The Borgias* is a Showtime product bought in for a BBC2 audience. Separating the production companies from the broadcasters also allows one to see the subtle differences between the strategies of BBC1 and BBC2 (the second BBC channel was set up explicitly to push the boundaries in edgy television, in broadly the same spirit as Channel 4). Such subtle but important differences explain why the family-friendly *Robin Hood* and *Merlin* were to take prime-time Saturday evening BBC1 slots, whereas *The Tudors* would end up joining *Rome* in a postwatershed midweek slot on BBC2. Examining the BBC's medieval television from this standpoint, then, reveals that there is more sex and violence, but there is also more family-friendly fare too.

Why Dirty *Medievalism*?

The final question to be raised, then, is not necessarily whether these worlds are more violent or sexier than earlier iterations but why the Middle Ages in particular should have become dirtier. This admittedly launches into a new line of questioning altogether, one that—in the continuing absence of hard data from sociological studies of audiences—must remain a purely hypothetical and largely speculative observation:[21] namely, that the increased violence in medieval television also serves the secondary function of increasing perceived authenticity. In this model, there is more violence because audiences believe that the medieval

world was violent; this belief is, in turn, predicated on the familiarity of mediated examples of the Middle Ages that demonstrate heightened levels of violence.

Rather than answering the question, however, this solution moves backward one stage further because it raises fresh questions about how each channel or production company decides on these criteria in the first place. Such inquiries expose a problem of television studies when talking about audience expectations, which work in a more structured and codified way in television than they do in the world of literature.[22] Whereas in discussions of genre and literary inheritance it might be unproblematic to talk about broader movements and trends that influence a given writer at a given moment, in television new series are often responding to specific, targeted audiences of similar programming emerging at roughly the same time. At this point, then, there arises the recognition that each new series is not, in fact, responding *directly* to the actual desires of a target audience but rather reflects their desires as imagined by network executives and researchers, imaginings that are in turn based on what those audiences are presumed to have watched in the past. Using the same logic, this process also works in reverse, so a successful new television series will thus become the basis for new projections about audience desires and expectations. This may not be good news for critics of *Game of Thrones*, for example, for just as the publicity surrounding the series' release would call it a medieval *Sopranos* and point out its debt to Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*, so too is its success likely to give birth to a slew of medievalesque series in the future.

Fusing those three ideas together, then, brings me to a frequently overlooked paradox; far from respecting existing genre conventions, a given television series is simultaneously responding to and shaping the desires and expectations of a given audience. It is in this sense both the product and the producer of its own audience expectations. This is where Hans Robert Jauss's celebrated theory, that a reading is determined by each reader's "horizon of expectations," needs to be extended to fit a

modern postnetwork age.[23] Television texts no longer work purely in response to genre (if ever they did), but as Steve Neale argues, they also participate in genre and in doing so tend to "participate in more than one genre at once."[24] Instead of working sequentially—where existing content affects the shape and flavor of new content—in television production the reception of a given cultural product is less determined by preexisting genre and generic markers but instead develops its own generic markers (which tie it to other genres or other content) that are later supported by advertising campaigns and even scheduling.[25]

All of this demonstrates that there is a distinctly gray area when talking about audience expectations in relation to modern television, making it difficult to suggest that an overall increase of violence is rooted in any kind of genre conventions. The tendency to associate the term *gritty* with realism emerges not because of a conceptual link between the two concepts (why should reality be only gritty and dark?) but in order to separate it from the romantic, nostalgic, or democratically updated view of the Middle Ages; thus, the two halves of the same genre are operating in deliberate opposition to one another.[26] As one contributor to the Parents' Guide to *The Pillars of the Earth* comments, revealingly, the violence in the series is not excessive but is "typical of a medieval fashion. Not very gory, but violent nevertheless."[27] Yet the same site suggests that *Merlin*, a wholly family-friendly series, offers "sword-fights, fist fights and tipical medievil [*sic*] battles."[28] Thus, the gritty medieval worlds on offer in television operate partly as an opposite reaction to something else, pitting fantasy against realism, even though both are operating on the same kinds of fundamental audience expectations.

Conclusion

Looking at the dirty medievalism of medieval-themed television, then, demonstrates that Periale's casual assertion of a sexy blueprint is, in fact, largely supported, but only in the sense that any such formulaic depiction of the medieval world forms part of an industrial strategy in

a postnetwork era rather than a specific association between the Middle Ages and dirtiness per se. The examples of *The Pillars of the Earth* and *Camelot* examined here fit into a wider pattern of what Eco called shaggy medievalism not because medieval television series are in fact getting any dirtier but rather because there are simply more medieval worlds on offer, and only some of them follow this sexy blueprint. Adopting a broader view of the televisual landscape allows for a new perspective on the tendency toward dirty medievalism, meaning that Periale was right for the wrong reasons. It is true that a brief glance at today's medieval television does reveal a greater extent of dirty medievalism, but at the same time this is not necessarily any more concentrated when viewed as a proportion of the wider televisual landscape. The Middle Ages on television, in fact, are just as dirty or as clean, as fantastic or realistic as they have always been. The only demonstrable difference is that those actively *seeking* a dirty medieval world simply need to subscribe to the right cable package.

Table 1. Medievalist television programs.

	Year	Production Company	USA Distribution/ Broadcast	UK Distribution/ Broadcast
Camelot	2011	Starz/GK Films	Starz	Channel 4
Pillars of the Earth	2010	Tandem, Muse, Scott Free	Starz	Channel 4
The Borgias	2011-13	Showtime, Octagon, Take 5 Films	Showtime	Sky Atlantic
Game of Thrones	2011-	HBO, Television 360	HBO	Sky Atlantic
The Tudors	2007-10	Showtime, Peace Arch, Working Title	Showtime (later BBC America)	BBC2
Merlin	2008-12	Shine, BBC Wales	NBC (season 1), SyFy (season 2-5)	BBC1
Robin Hood	2006-9	Tiger Aspect, BBC	BBC America	BBC1

Source. Compiled by the author.

NOTES

1. Periale, "Lots of Sex and a Little Violence."
2. Eco, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages" (1987), 69.
3. See, for example, Gray and Bell, *History on Television.*
4. See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.*
5. See, for example, Dell, "Controversies in the Early History of Channel Four," 1–52.
6. The relationship between British television and Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is long and complicated; for an excellent introduction, see James McDonnell, *Public Service Broadcasting.* For our purposes, however, Channel 4's PSB requirements call for a minimum proportion of content that would, as John Reith's famous dictum goes, "inform, educate, and entertain." It is for this reason that some might criticize its broadcasting gratuitous or overly sexual content. However, Tracey (1998) has convincingly argued that PSB commitments have in any case been watered down since the mid-1980s, an argument that would entitle both Channel 4 and the publicly owned BBC, as much as any other network, to seek ratings-boosting fare.
7. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages,* 6.
8. *The Pillars of the Earth* was first broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK on Saturday, 16 October 2010.
9. *Rome* was first broadcast on BBC2 in a midweek slot, debuting on Wednesday, 2 November 2005. *The Tudors* was first broadcast on BBC2 on Friday, 5 October 2007. Crucially, however, both were scheduled for the same nine p.m. slot.
10. See, for example, Hale, "Ian McShane in Starz Mini-Series of Ken Follett Book"; Thorpe, "Has Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth* Got the Winning Ingredients?"; Jones, "The Weekend's TV: *The Pillars of the Earth, Desperate Housewives*"; and Parker, "C4 Secures *Pillars of the Earth.*"
11. IMDb, "Parents Guide for *The Pillars of the Earth,*" accessed 1 April 2014, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1453159/parentalguide?ref_=tt_stry_pg.
12. Common Sense Media review of *The Pillars of the Earth,* accessed 15 May 2014, https://www.commonsensemedia.org/movie-reviews/the-pillars-of-the-earth.
13. The extent of the cuts would lead in both the United States and the UK to a reduction of the overall screen time; in the UK the eight episodes of

the original feature were condensed to seven (a double bill on 16 October and then five subsequent episodes (see BBC iPlayer), while in the United States it was reduced to six episodes in total.

14. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception.*
15. For an excellent overview of the periodic moral panics over teen cinema, see Kaveney, *Teen Dreams*, esp. 2–4.
16. See Petley, Critcher, Hughes, and Rohloff, *Moral Panics in the Contemporary World*; Thompson, *Moral Panics*; Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance.*
17. Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, 10.
18. There is, of course, an extensive body of literature on the problematic subject of violence in the Middle Ages and the problem of understanding such violence today. The major works, in my view, remain Kaeuper's *Violence in Medieval Society* and *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*; and Meyerson, Thiery, and Falk, *A Great Effusion of Blood?*. For more on understanding medieval violence in the context of popular film, see Finke and Shichtman's excellent "No Pain, No Gain"; or chapter 4 of Andrew B. R. Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Ages.*
19. See Elliott, "British Historical Drama and the Middle Ages."
20. Regarding *cult television*, by no means an innocent term, see, for example, Pearson's definition in "Observations on Cult Television," which argues for the centrality of audiences and "interpretive audience practices" (7–8).
21. This is, for example, the sort of inquiry that has only just begun in medievalism, but the early results make for real insights into the public reception and perception of the period. See, for instance, Sturtevant's doctoral thesis, some of which appears in his chapter "'You Don't Learn It Deliberately.'"
22. Geraghty and Jancovich, *The Shifting Definitions of Genre.*
23. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, esp. chapter 3, "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature,"
24. Creeber, *The Television Genre Book*, 2.
25. I have discussed the problems of such a coproduction model elsewhere in relation to HBO's *Rome*, wherein the different decisions of the three production companies involved eventually rendered the program three very different products in the three countries of reception. See Elliott, "Rewriting European History."

26. See, for instance, Pugh and Aronstein, *The Disney Middle Ages*; Aronstein and Coiner, "Twice Knightly."
27. IMDb, "Parents Guide for *The Pillars of the Earth*," accessed 3 April 2014, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1453159/parentalguide?ref_=tt_stry_pg#certification.
28. IMDB, "Parents Guide for *Merlin*," accessed 29 May 2014, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1199099/parentalguide?ref_=tt_stry_pg.

Section III

Science-Fiction Medievalisms

Chapter 6

Empire and After

Science Fiction's Medievalism in the Golden Age and Beyond

Don Riggs

Saul Bass's 1968 documentary film *Why Man Creates* starts with a four-and-a-half minute animated section outlining the historical development of human progress from Neolithic hunting cultures to the late 1960s. At one point, an august official in a toga announces, "Roman law is now in session" and pounds his gavel. Its impact starts a crack that demolishes the entire marble structure, followed by a period of darkness in which muttering masses infiltrate the screen, after which the masses become monks processing from right to left. In a quasi-Gregorian mode, they sing in antiphonal call and response:

> What shape is the earth? Flat.
> What happens when you get to the edge? You fall off.
> Does the earth move? Neeeeeever![1]

Of course there is no responsory about this exaggeration of the pre-Copernican cosmology in the canon; what this parody foregrounds is a

mid-twentieth-century prejudice about the medieval world view using the *reductio ad absurdum* concerning one conception of the flat earth. Although this view is obviously nonsensical, the episode illustrates one attitude about the medieval period prominent in two of the best-known and most highly revered works from the golden age of science fiction: Isaac Asimov's 1951 *Foundation* and Walter M. Miller Jr.'s 1959 *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. A twenty-first-century science-fiction and fantasy author, Pearl North, read both of these works as a teen, and though she was not reacting to them in any specific or conscious way in her 2009 novel *Libyrinth*,[2] she has taken the tropes of medievalism established in the earlier works and fashioned a more subtle and nuanced medievalist society with specific relation to the preservation of ancient knowledge.

Religious historian Anne Clark Bartlett points out in relation to Michel Foucault's "Medievalism" that "we *all* have 'medievalisms': varying theoretical perspectives, experiences, and interests that determine what we find significant in medieval literature generally"[3] and, I would add, what we view as significant in the historical medieval period. After all, the term *middle age* or the postclassical Latin *medium aevum* was used during the Renaissance to distinguish the contemporary revival of classical learning from the age that separated it from classical antiquity; the Renaissance view was that this backward period was to be transcended as soon as possible—witness François Rabelais's contrast between Gargantua's first stab at education and his subsequent superior tutelage and the giant's letter to his son Pantagruel concerning education. Lorenzo DiTommaso refers to Asimov's "well-known" use of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* "as the model for the downfall of his galactic-empire of Trantor"[4] and has helpfully provided a history of the literature on the topic in a note;[5] however, DiTommaso's interest is more in the theme of imperial decadence and decline in science fiction; thus, he has spent little time on the medievalist phenomenon of the period that emerged from the empire's fall. The medievalism that is of interest in this chapter is the Benedictine, Cassiodoran, monastic Middle Ages of scriptoria, where earlier works, both religious and secular, were preserved for later ages

through endless, patient copying, along with the contrast between the written word and the oral tradition that characterized so much medieval literature.

Asimov's *Foundation* is, very briefly, a deep-space far-future narrative with no mention of Earth as a primordial planet of the human species, although Earth does have a mythical status and some attention is paid to it in both sequels and prequels—*Foundation* itself consists of a "stitch-up" of short stories published in the 1940s, whereas the two subsequent novels, *Foundation and Empire* and *Second Foundation*, are also composed of short stories; the three novels together, collectively called the *Foundation* trilogy, constitute one of the most prominent works of the golden age of science fiction (1938–1946). Five more novels were later added as prequels and sequels. The original novel is set at the height of the power and extent of the Galactic Empire and initially focuses on the mathematician Hari Seldon, whose science of psychohistory, he claims, can predict the overall movements of humanity as a collective entity. Because Seldon's calculations indicate not only that the empire will decline and fall but also that there are already signs this is happening in his present historical moment, he is tried for treason. Through his adroit manipulation, the Foundation is set up in a distant corner of the galaxy to create a great encyclopedia of all knowledge. The rest of the novel concerns the actions of members of the Foundation on that planet as they confront crises predicted by Seldon, whose holographic messages are delivered periodically in a vault set up for that purpose.

In contrast, Walter M. Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* takes place on Earth in a future much nearer today's age than that in Asimov's series. Three novellas, originally published separately, were stitched together to make the novel; the first of these sections, "*Fiat homo*" (Let there be man) is the section of interest here, for it depicts a medievalistic human society some centuries after a nuclear war has destroyed most of human civilization. Of chief interest here is the preservation of culture through the storage and copying of texts from the era before the nuclear

holocaust; the two following sections, "*Fiat lux*" (Let there be light) and "*Fiat voluntas tua*" (Thy will be done) chronicle two later stages in the redevelopment of science, technology, and subsequent nuclear war.

Finally, Paula North's *Libyrinth*, the first volume of her Libyrinth trilogy, is set on an Earth-like planet that was settled by spacefaring colonists from Earth some centuries earlier. The inhabitants of this unnamed planet were divided into an educated and privileged elite and a class of slaves who did all of the hard work and were denied any education beyond the technical skills they needed to grow crops and operate the civilization's machinery. After the inevitable rebellion and apparent extinction of the ruling class, the successors to this civilization split into two groups, one of which was literate and preserved the vast library of the Ancients and the other of which was illiterate and developed an oral culture. The latter group, known as the Eradicants, wants to destroy all of the books once they find the one that contains the secret to generating power.

What I suggest about the variations on the medieval presented by these three novels is that they all represent periods of cultural and technological decline following the collapse of a powerful, technologically advanced, and knowledge-rich empire—Asimov's Galactic Empire, Miller's unnamed Cold War–era nuclear powers, and North's Ancient Earth and its descendants on her colonized planet—and that the three authors have treated this postlapsarian society with different degrees of sympathy and understanding, possibly reflecting their varying degrees of knowledge about and sympathy for the historical Middle Ages. For Asimov, the Middle Ages, or the interregnum between the fall of the Galactic Empire and the rise of another, are "dark ages."[6] Of primary interest in Asimov are the enlightened calculations of Seldon and his followers, who use the science of psychohistory to limit the thirty thousand years of dark ages to a mere millennium, and the actions depicted in his novels focus on the Foundation, the sole institution to preserve past knowledge and actively acquire new knowledge in the context of this

age. Asimov's conception is of, to borrow Umberto Eco's phrase, "the Middle Ages as a *barbaric age*."[7] Asimov was interested less in anything medieval than in the manner of evading it, and though, as DiTommaso has pointed out, he initially based his narrative on Gibbon's *Decline*, the moment he moved his plot into dealing with a more science-fictional challenge—the rise of the mutant known as the Mule—he left his model. Donald Palumbo has meticulously shown how Asimov, in the original Foundation stories, anticipated the articulation of chaos theory by two or three decades and dubbed this science *psychohistory*.[8] Asimov's novel, then, is interested in the Middle Ages only as a barbaric dark age, the fear of which stimulates the development of a theory that will enable humanity to limit and survive it.

Miller's *Canticle*, according to Kathryn Hume, is the "one really sophisticated use of non-specific borrowing" of elements of medieval life in the form of "Lenten vigils, copy work in the scriptorium, papal envoys concerned with canonization procedure, and the evolution of popular religious mythology."[9] Unlike Asimov's *Foundation* narratives, *Canticle* contains no character whose understanding transcends the medievalist piety or barbarism, and Miller's pessimistic cyclical vision of history is implicit in the overall plot, as opposed to Asimov's optimistic cyclical vision of history understood, perhaps, by Seldon but imparted by him to the faithful members of the Foundation to fulfill.

North's *Libyrinth* places the reader directly within the context of a society with medievalist methods of agriculture, transportation, and warfare and occasional surviving elements of an energy technology of a long-fallen advanced civilization, much as the medieval Anglo-Saxons attributed the remains of the Roman roads to giants or gods, given that their construction was obviously beyond their own technology. North has avoided apparent similarities to Miller's narrative by placing her action on another planet in the far future, and her work is not nostalgic for either the golden age of science fiction or the Middle Ages. The novel takes two apparently oppositional elements of medieval culture, that

of monastic scriptoria and that of preliterate orality, and assesses the values in each one. North's driving thematic intent seems to synthesize the opposed elements in her medievalist setting.

Asimov's initial justification for his Foundation—rather, the character Hari Seldon's apparent reason for creating it—lay in the writing of the massive *Encyclopedia Galactica*, which was to limit the probable thirty thousand years of barbarism—read: Middle Ages—to a mere thousand by preserving the knowledge of the era of Galactic Empire for subsequent humanity to use. In a sense, this more closely resembles the *Encycopédie* of Diderot and other Enlightenment French writers than the piecemeal copying of texts by medieval monks. The fact that this justification is a ruse is raised only by Seldon himself in one of his posthumous appearances as a holographic recording:

> The Encyclopedia Foundation, to begin with, is a fraud, and always has been! ... It is a fraud in the sense that neither I nor my colleagues care at all whether a single volume of the Encyclopedia is ever published. It has served its purpose, since by it we extracted an imperial charter from the Emperor, by it we attracted the hundred thousand humans necessary for our scheme ... In the fifty years that you have worked on this fraudulent project ... your retreat has been cut off, and you have now no choice but to proceed on the infinitely more important project that was, and is, our real plan.[10]

The privileged readers know that the *Encyclopedia Galactica* is ultimately published in this fictional world because Asimov has helpfully preceded each chapter with an info dump extracted from the 116th edition of that massive work.

Before Seldon's holographic revelation just quoted, the encyclopedists are still laboring under the illusion that their work is at the core of the Foundation. The chairman of the Foundation's board of trustees is named Dr. Lewis Pirenne—possibly a reference to Henri Pirenne, an early twentieth-century Belgian historian of the Middle Ages, hence a little signal to the reader that the man is behind the times—and is incapable of

accepting the pragmatic Salvor Hardin's realization that the empire is no longer vital enough to protect the Foundation. Hardin, in addition, sees that Pirenne and the imperial envoy Lord Dorwin share an antiquarian approach toward science, as Hardin comments: "Lord Dorwin thought the way to be a good archaeologist was to read all the books on the subject—written by men who were dead for centuries ... And Pirenne listened and made no objections. Don't you see that there's something wrong with that?"[11] Hardin—and through him, Asimov—might as well be critiquing the monastic project of copying texts rather than writing new ones.

The decay of learning that Asimov's work emphasizes through his forward-thinking characters' observations is the loss of scientific and technological knowledge, and a specific indicator of that decline is the loss of nuclear power. In this decay of science and technology lies the Foundation's first key to self-preservation: the use of superior technology to awe the neighboring barbarian star systems. Here, Asimov has adapted elements of Gibbon's skeptical attitude toward religion. Gibbon, in describing various reasons for the success of the early church in converting pagans to Christianity, dismissively states that "credulity performed the office of faith; fanaticism was permitted to assume the language of inspiration, and the effects of accident or contrivance were ascribed to supernatural causes."[12] Asimov, following in Gibbon's footsteps, described an organization whose science and technological mastery far outreaches the capabilities of neighboring kingdoms, such that the Foundation cynically develops a religion based on "miracles" manufactured by its advanced technology and succeeds in manipulating large masses of people through their credulity, orchestrating communications rife with showmanship and special effects. Asimov's Foundation, then, takes on the role that Gibbon attributed to the church of the early Middle Ages, although the Foundation's organizers of the new nuclear religion are much more openly cynical about their project—at least in conversations among themselves—than Gibbon reported his ecclesiastics to be.

Although Miller is not on record as having been influenced by Gibbon, the eighteenth-century skeptic's description of monasticism parallels Miller's description of the monastic vocation in post-nuclear war New Mexico. Gibbon wrote: "These unhappy exiles from social life were impelled by the dark and implacable genius of superstition ... and each proselyte who entered the gates of a monastery was persuaded that he trod the steep and thorny path of eternal happiness."[13] However, without analyzing the activities of the scriptorium overlong, Gibbon admitted, "posterity must gratefully acknowledge that the monuments of Greek and Roman literature have been preserved and multiplied by their indefatigable pens."[14] These two aspects of the monastic life are blended in Miller's character Brother Francis Gerard of Utah, whose Lenten vigil in the desert has apparently addled his wits through physical labor in the heat of the sun, and whose accidental discovery of an ancient bomb shelter, complete with a box containing relics of his order's founder, the Blessed Leibowitz himself, is inflected by both his ingenuousness and suspicions on the part of others that he has been having hallucinations. There is a remarkable parallel between Brother Francis's initial Lenten fast in the desert and this passage from Gibbon:

> It was their firm persuasion that the air which they breathed was peopled with invisible enemies; with innumerable demons, who watched every occasion, and assumed every form, to terrify, and above all to tempt, their unguarded virtue. The imagination, and even the senses, were deceived by the illusions of distempered fanaticism; and the hermit, whose midnight prayer was oppressed by involuntary slumber, might easily confound the phantoms of horror or delight which had occupied his sleeping and his waking dreams.[15]

When Brother Francis accidentally breaks into the buried Fallout Shelter, he is dismayed that it advertises itself as a shelter for a demon known as a "Fallout," even though Francis has no clear knowledge of what a Fallout would be. However, he can imagine: "Brother Francis visualized a Fallout as half-salamander, because, according to tradition, the thing was

born in the Flame Deluge, and as half-incubus who despoiled virgins in their sleep, for, were not the monsters of the world still called 'children of the Fallout'?"[16] Similarly, when a priest is hearing Brother Francis's confession during his solo Lenten vigil in the desert, after Francis has admitted to "gluttonous thoughts" (inspired by a lizard with "such magnificent hams—thick as your thumb and plump, and I kept thinking how it would taste like chicken, roasted all brown and crisp outside"), he goes on to admit to concupiscent thoughts about a succubus seen in a dream, and furthermore, he "kept thinking about her. Kept imagining it all over again" after waking up.[17]

However, it is the copyists' labor in monastic scriptoria that is both celebrated and parodied in *Canticle*. The document that Francis has discovered is a blueprint labeled "Transistorized Control System for Unit Six-B," about which no one at the monastery has the faintest understanding but which Brother Francis copies in exacting detail, using a great deal of ink to surround the white lines and letters, even reproducing what appear to be stains in the document. Having made as exact a copy as possible and having discovered that the white-on-blue aspect of the blueprint was accidental, Francis then makes an illuminated copy.

> He considered gold inlay for the squiggles and doohickii, but the thingumbob was too intricate for goldwork, and a gold quid would seem ostentatious. The quiggles just *had* to be done jet black, but that meant that the lines should be off-black, to assert the quiggles. While the unsymmetrical design would have to stay as it was, he could think of no reason why its meaning would be altered by using it as a trellis for a climbing vine, whose branches (carefully dodging the quiggles) might be made to furnish an impression of symmetry or render asymmetry natural.[18]

The dramatic irony that runs through Miller's entire narrative emphasizes that the monks are reverently preserving, through copying, materials about whose meaning they have no idea. This ignorance is foregrounded when Brother Jeris teases Brother Francis for not knowing what the blueprint represents:

> "What was the subject matter of Electronics?"
> "That too is written," said Francis, who had searched the Memorabilia from high to low in an attempt to find clues which might make the blueprint slightly more comprehensible—but to very small avail. "The subject matter of Electronics was the electron," he explained.
> "So it is written, indeed. I am impressed. I know so little of these things. What, pray, was the 'electron'?"
> "Well, there is one fragmentary source which alludes to it as a 'Negative Twist of Nothingness.'"
> "What! How did they negate a nothingness? Wouldn't that make it a somethingness?"
> "Perhaps the negation applies to 'twist.'"
> "Ah! Then we would have an 'Untwisted Nothing,' eh? Have you discovered how to untwist a nothingness?"
> "Not yet," Francis admitted.
> "Well keep at it, Brother! How clever they must have been, those ancients—to know how to untwist nothing. Keep at it, and you may learn how."[19]

Despite the ridicule that Jeris subjects Francis to, and despite the very real ignorance that occasions it, one cannot help but feel a certain fondness for Brother Francis, for he is a Holy Fool, who reveres the Blessed Leibowitz without any intellectual comprehension of the schematic diagram that is his only relic.

After the nuclear holocaust, or the Flame Deluge, in Miller's future history, there was a reaction against those who had brought it about: "there began the bloodletting of the Simplification, when remnants of mankind had torn other remnants limb from limb, killing rulers, scientists, leaders, technicians, teachers, and whatever persons the leaders of the maddened mobs said deserved death for having helped to make the Earth what it had become."[20] At the end of this process, "the fury was directed not against the learned, for there were none, but against the merely literate."[21] North was to pick up this trope in *Libyrinth*, but one might first consider its possible origin in Gibbon's account of the destruction

of the library of Alexandria. The destruction was fundamentally that of the temple of Serapis in 385 CE, but the library was contained within the precincts of the temple. As Gibbon put it, "The valuable library of Alexandria was pillaged or destroyed; and near twenty years afterwards, the appearance of the empty shelves excited the regret and indignation of every spectator who was not darkened totally by religious prejudice."[22] This last detail is based on the Latin comment of the Christian historian Paulus Orosius, about whom, in a note, Gibbon wrote, "Though a bigot and a controversial writer, Orosius seems to blush."[23]

North's *Libyrinth* takes place some centuries after the Ancients' civilization has collapsed, leaving behind them the ruins of a technology that the contemporaries of North's world regard with a mixture of awe and distrust. At first, readers are led to believe that all of their learning is preserved in books in an enormous building, the Libyrinth, so called because its stacks continue in vast networks of tunnels beyond the ken of anyone living in and caring for the repository. Indeed, the main character, Haly, is a young woman whose parents had both worked in the Libyrinth but wandered off into the stacks and disappeared forever, thus rendering Haly an orphan, a trait that could qualify her to be a Monomythic quest hero.[24] The Libyrarians and their clerks care for and catalog the vast holdings of books—even centuries after the fall of the Ancients, untold numbers of books have not yet been cataloged—and for two centuries members of a barbarian tribe called the Eradicants have been burning all the books they can. Theirs is an oral culture one of whose precepts is that "when a word is spoken, it is born, when it is written, it dies."[25] In a sense, then, the Libyrarians parallel Asimov's encyclopedists and Miller's monastic scribes, whereas North's Eradicants parallel Miller's so-called simpletons, who engineered the Simplification, as well as Gibbon's fanatical Christians, who destroyed the library at Alexandria. Asimov's *Foundation* lacks the book-burners of Gibbon, Miller, and North.

One trope that is held in common by Asimov, Miller, and North is the awareness of the loss of nuclear power. As an example of the stagnation

of the empire, including the Foundation, Salvor Hardin exclaims, "Here in the Periphery they've lost nuclear power. In Gamma Andromeda, a power plant has undergone meltdown because of poor repairs, and the Chancellor of the Empire complains that nuclear technicians are scarce. And the solution? To train new ones? Never! Instead they're to restrict nuclear power."[26] In Miller's postwar Earth, of course, nuclear power is only a terrifying memory of the Flame Deluge, although one monk, the Venerable Boedullus,

> had written with obvious delight to his Lord Abbott that his small expedition had uncovered the remains of, in his own words, "the site of an intercontinental launching pad, complete with several subterranean storage tanks." No one at the abbey ever knew what the Venerable Boedullus meant by "intercontinental launching pad," but the Lord Abbott who had reigned at the time sternly decreed that monastic antiquarians must, on pain of excommunication, avoid such "pads" henceforth. For his letter to the abbot was the last that anyone ever saw of the Venerable Boedullus, his party, his "launching pad" site, and the small village which had grown up over that site.[27]

This Venerable Boedullus is an obvious allusion to the Venerable Bede, the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon monk whose *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* provides the most detailed account of the conversion of early England to Christianity, although it is not clear whether Miller had any particular reason for treating Bede in this way. Possibly here Miller has simply used the reference to Bede in a way parallel to Asimov's use of the name of the Belgian medievalist Pirenne: as a quick jab at a figure associated with the Middle Ages.

In North's world, energy for buildings and mechanisms comes from objects called Eggs, which act somewhat as batteries do, although the principle operating in them is unknown. A primary-source book for Haly's supervisor, the Libyrarian Selene, is the *Theselaides*, in which it is written: "[The Ancients] encased this miracle of light and power within the objects we know as Eggs, but though I have long sought the

method, I have never discovered it. In the days of my youth I believed kol-fusion to be the answer, but I was proven wrong ... at the cost of many lives!"[28] Although North did not use *Canticle* directly as a model in writing *Libyrinth*, there seems to be a parallel to the Venerable Boedullus here. In all three works, then, tinkering with nuclear energy without adequate training occurs, and it proves dangerous, pointing to the loss of technological safeguards in the "medieval" period following the collapse of empire.

It is in describing the Eradicants as an oral culture that North has taken a step beyond Asimov and Miller, for neither of those two science-fiction writers considered that aspect of preliterate culture. Hans Robert Jauss argues that the "invention of the printing press is ... the event which more than any other has closed off medieval culture for us as 'the time before.' Anyone who has grown up as a reader can only with difficulty imagine how an illiterate could have seen the world without writing."[29] North's novel shows the Eradicants at first through the perspective of the literate Libyrarians, as barbarians, but when Haly is captured by a group of Eradicants, readers see this oral culture with more sympathetic understanding. Indeed, Haly will attempt to synthesize the two cultures for the overall improvement of life on her world, and North's book shows the oral poet composing in meter and rhyme and has others memorizing the composition on the spot in order to preserve the narrative.[30]

That North's oral poets are depicted in the processes of composition and memorization is itself a parallel to at least some oral literature. Besides using the blind poet Demodokos of the *Odyssey* as a representative of the singer of tales in the palace of the Phaiakians, *Beowulf* shows a skald in the process of improvising a lay about Beowulf the morning after the hero wrenches off Grendel's arm:

> At whiles a servant of the king, a man laden with proud memories who had lays in mind and recalled a host and multitude of tales of old—word followed word, each truly linked to each—this man in his turn began with skill to treat the quest of Beowulf and

> in flowing verse to utter his ready tale, interweaving words. He recounted all he had heard tell concerning Sigemund's works of prowess, many a strange tale.[31]

In other words, the anonymous skald is shown composing the story of Beowulf and fitting it with other tales of heroism, both parallel and contrasting, as well as using the interlace method characteristic of Anglo-Saxon verse—the "interweaving words." Although the Eradicants' oral tradition is different from the *Beowulf* poet's, North's illustration of oral composition echoes the medieval trope.

North's medievalist oral culture differs from that described in Albert B. Lord's classic study *The Singer of Tales* in that Lord and his mentor, Milman Parry, had studied the oral literature of Balkan singers, which, like the much earlier Homeric epics, was based on the oral formulaic principle. In this mode of narrative transmission, each singer improvises a song based on a repertory of phrases—epithets such as *flashing-eyed Athena, wily Odysseus, Nestor of the silver tongue*, longer phrases such as *Then Idomeneus Lord of the Kretans answered him in turn*,[32] and then the extended epic similes that start with a point of similarity to the action being described but attain an escape velocity and develop on their own.[33] These oral formulas are stock phrases that provide the singer units with which to build a narrative following a certain meter. Lord has also touched on medieval French epics, such as *La chanson de Roland*, which use both oral formulas and either end-rhyme or assonance at the end of lines,[34] but pointed out that oral formulas are much more common in the first half of lines than in the second: "the first part of the line is much more hospitable to formulas than the second part. This is undoubtedly because of the assonance at the end of the line."[35] The need for keeping to the assonantal or rhyme scheme makes the use of oral formulas more difficult, unless they too involve the rhyme or assonance. North, in using rhyme as the basis for her world's oral poetry, has chosen one mode of literary coherence and one type of mnemonic aid over another.

The use of rhyme as opposed to oral formulas makes sense in that this mode fits into North's contemporary North American culture, where rap artists use heavily accented rhymes to hold together their improvised or memorized texts. The rapper played by Eminem in the 2002 film *8 Mile* is shown writing down lists of words on pieces of paper crammed in his pocket: he is jotting down lists of rhyming words as they occur to him, and he will be able to draw on them when he is performing, as in the insult contest with his opponent at the film's climax. However, as the use of scrap paper and writing suggests, this mode of establishing a rhyming repertory for use in improvised performance is not purely oral, as the Eradicants—or, as they call themselves, the Singers—insist that theirs is. It is possible that as the Singers' oral culture grew in rebellion against the Ancients' literate culture, their orality developed in part in response to written texts and that the process of memorizing fixed texts was the basis of their practice. An example of this process is given in relation to a copy of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, discovered hidden in the house of a family: "They were arrested and the book was seized. One of them will recite it for a chorus" (135) so that the chorus can memorize it.

North's novel shows the Singers creating, memorizing, and performing songs—not only those containing narratives (the only narratives referred to in the text purport to be historical in nature; fiction is not mentioned) but also others preserving scientific and technical knowledge and procedures. On their way through the countryside, the Eradicants stop at a village and remind one resident of a mnemonic they had taught him the previous spring, concerning the proper feed for cows.[36] Haly is taken to hear various choruses practicing their songs, thus preserving the knowledge contained in them: "she'd listened to the Chorus of Medicine, the Chorus of Mechanics, the Chorus of Soldiers ... even the Chorus of Cattle Breeding." One example given is a couplet on magnetism: "Positive charge, negative charge, these are the two kinds. / Like charges repel each other, opposites do bind."[37] These rhymes fit into an Anglo-American tradition of mnemonic verses like that for tying a square knot: "right over left, left over right, makes a knot that ties good and tight." These

also have affinities with the rhyming proverbs published by Benjamin Franklin in *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Finally, there is the chorus that sings the periodic table of the elements;[38] one is reminded of Tom Lehrer's setting of that list to the tune of "A Modern Major-General" from *The Pirates of Penzance* by Gilbert and Sullivan!

Although the Libyrarians are shown to sing, at least to help learn the alphabet when they are first schooled,[39] the Eradicants, or the Singers, not only are forbidden from ever reading written texts, but they are taught that doing so will make them blind and prevent them from hearing the mystical Song that unifies them as a culture and a people.[40] The prohibition against reading is derived from the account—some would call it a founding myth—of the friends Yammon and Iscarion, who together led the revolt against the Ancients. These Ancients were literate and forced their slaves to remain illiterate so they would be unable to communicate; however, the slaves found that singing was a way of communicating among themselves and of preserving knowledge as well.[41] Iscarion was a slave who learned to read; one is reminded of the pre–Civil War American slave Frederick Douglass, for whom learning the forbidden art of reading was the beginning of a lifelong career of gaining his own freedom and working for the freedom of his fellow slaves. However, at least according to the story told to Haly by the Singer Siblea, after the slaves' rebellion the literate Iscarion refused to share the skill of reading, which he had developed at great risk to himself, with his former friend Yammon and his followers, who had not taken that risk under the old regime. Thus was the division between Readers and Singers established, along with the resultant enmity between the two groups.[42]

Haly is uniquely qualified to mediate between the oral and literate cultures of her time because she has been endowed from birth with a psychic power: she can "hear" what books say, even when she does not read them with her eyes. She has long since learned not to tell anyone of this power or to demonstrate it lest she be thought crazy. However, in the intensification of the conflict between Libyrarians and Eradicants,

she is forced to reveal this ability to the Libyrarian for whom she is a clerk; once she is captured by Eradicants, this power brands her first as a witch, and when more erudite Eradicants find out about it, she is recognized as a figure of legend whose prophesied appearance will bring about the Redemption—some unspecified major shift in world status. What Haly ultimately does is subtly manipulate the situation toward the best possible outcome, which in her mind is a reconciliation and fusion of the two cultures. She shows first one Eradicant and then another more powerful one that reading letters from a book does not in fact result in the reader's death, as they have been taught from childhood, and she is asked whether there is a song—reflecting the mode that this oral culture learns through—to teach them the art of interpreting written letters. Indeed, there is; it is a song that Libyrarian children are shown learning early in their education, at the beginning of the book, and it goes like this: "A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P," and so on. Known as "The Alphabet Song" in the United States, it uses the same melody as the children's songs "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep."

The Middle Ages, figured as the benighted period following the collapse of a highly civilized empire, have been projected into a deep-space far future by Asimov in *Foundation* and into a post–nuclear war not-so-far-future Earth by Miller in *Canticle*, and in both works the era is associated with scientific and technological ignorance. North, having read these novels, undoubtedly assimilated an awareness of this attitude—indeed, North's has Haly "hear" a sentence from the *Foundation* trilogy twice when she experiences the voices of various books in the Libyrinth reading to her.[43] North refers to her characters' civilization as having come from "Old Earth," "thousands of years ago,"[44] and some of the physical books that appear in the text are those of "the late-period Earth publishers."[45] North's vision differs from Gibbon's, Asimov's, and Miller's in that she sees value in both the literate and the illiterate cultures and has developed her own version of an oral tradition, something completely ignored in the earlier writers' works. She has obviously integrated Starhawk's

statement, also "heard" randomly by Haly in the Libyrinth, "Balance is necessary,"[46] into her vision of the postimperial future.

The medievalisms illustrated in these three novels vary not only in the value judgments implicit in the authors' treatments of the different "middle ages" following the collapse of powerful empires but also in the amount of focus on what the historical Middle Ages actually were. Asimov's interest in any actual medieval culture is minimal; for him, the Renaissance and Enlightenment view of this period as the time between the fall of a highly civilized culture and its rebirth centuries later is the only one. The fall of the Galactic Empire ushers in a period of barbarism, reflected in the decay of technological know-how, particularly as regards nuclear power, and the replacement of scientific method with a reverence for tradition. Although Asimov's *Encyclopedia Galactica* more closely resembles the Enlightenment encyclopedia supervised by Diderot than, for example, the seventh-century *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, the compilers of this compendium of knowledge from the dying empire are depicted as small-minded and, indeed, as symptomatic of declining knowledge.

Miller's medievalistic period following the Flame Deluge, or nuclear holocaust, is in many ways much closer to the actual medieval period in terms of monastic scriptoria, observance of the Canonical Hours, and many other particulars of medieval monastic culture; of course, Miller's biting wit pillories the hapless Brother Francis Gerard of Utah as an ingenuous and in many ways ignorant man, although he may also be seen as a Holy Fool, pure in his faith and his intent.

However, Miller has ignored the oral culture that constituted much of the historical Middle Ages' vibrant intellectual and imaginational life; North's far-future fantasy creates such an oral culture and counterposes it to the conservative Libyrinth, bringing together the two medieval elements of literacy and orality in a way that *Foundation* and *Canticle* do not. In so doing, North's *Libyrinth* creates a balanced view of a medievalistic civilization, placing literacy and orality in a dynamic tension

and, through the engagement of the Libyrarians and the Eradicants, acknowledging that there is value in both modes of preserving and disseminating knowledge. Although the illiterate Eradicants are initially referred to as barbarians—as are Asimov's small-minded petty kingdoms at the edge of the galaxy, as well as many of the warlords and chieftains in Miller's North America—North's novel allows readers to see that they have preserved a great deal of practical knowledge and freely make that knowledge available to peasants working the land. Though *Libyrinth* is in no way an attempt to recreate the historical Middle Ages, it succeeds in recognizing a major element of that period and in integrating it into its own medievalist world.

NOTES

1. *Why Man Creates*, dir. Bass.
2. North, e-mail message to the author, 18 November, 2013.
3. Bartlett, "Foucault's 'Medievalism,'" 10.
4. DiTommaso, "The Articulation of Imperial Decadence and Decline," 272.
5. Ibid., 286.
6. Asimov, *Foundation*, 37.
7. Eco, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages" (1990), 69.
8. Palumbo, *Chaos Theory, Asimov's Foundations and Robots*, 28–31.
9. Hume, "Medieval Romance and Science Fiction," 17.
10. Asimov, *Foundation*, 93–94.
11. Ibid., 81.
12. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall*, 190.
13. Ibid., 595.
14. Ibid., 597.
15. Ibid., 598.
16. Miller, *Canticle*, 18.
17. Ibid., 34–35.
18. Ibid., 80.
19. Ibid., 77–78
20. Ibid., 63–64.
21. Ibid., 64.
22. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall*, 462.
23. Ibid., 819.
24. North, *Libyrinth*, 24.
25. Ibid., 11.
26. Asimov, *Foundation*, 87–88.
27. Miller, *Canticle*, 24.
28. North, *Libyrinth*, 18–19.
29. Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity," 188.
30. North, *Libyrinth*, 71–72.
31. Tolkien, *Beowulf* (Houghton Mifflin), 37.
32. Homer, *The Iliad*, 277–279.
33. Ibid., 88.
34. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 205.
35. Ibid., 202.

36. North, *Libyrinth*, 74.
37. Ibid., 172.
38. Ibid., 178.
39. Ibid., 42–43.
40. Ibid., 199.
41. Ibid., 222, 231.
42. Ibid., 113.
43. Ibid., 323, 326.
44. Ibid., 132, 162.
45. Ibid., 171
46. Ibid., 328.

Chapter 7

Sword and Science

Science-Fiction Interpretations of Medieval Arthurian Literature and Legend in *Stargate SG-1*

Steven Gil

In its last two seasons, *Stargate: SG-1* (1997–2007) shifted from a focus on Ancient mythologies[1] and structured its long-form serial narrative around a science-fiction interpretation of Arthurian legends. These medieval tales are reimagined in such a way as to fundamentally alter their genre and provide insight into twenty-first-century adaptations of past literature. By present-day expectations, the tales of King Arthur, his knights, and Merlin would be considered fantasy, fitting well into the subcategory of sword and sorcery. However, *SG-1* takes the legends out of their original context and imbues them with new science-fiction aspects. In this reinterpretation, Merlin goes from wizard to extraterrestrial scientist. Similarly, Morgan le Fey is transformed from a sorceress into another of Merlin's people. Other elements of Arthurian lore such as the Black Knight, Arthur's cloak, and the Holy Grail also appear, each divested of supernatural qualities and given new technological ones. This chapter

analyzes the Arthurian references in *SG-1*, looking at how they relate to the Arthurian corpus and exploring the ways in which the medieval material has been used, adapted, and developed into new forms.

THE TWO GENRES

Because a distinction between science fiction and fantasy is being made here, something must be said of the difference between the two. This is not the place to argue for categorical definitions or to carry out a full discussion of what broadly distinguishes science fiction. Therefore, the following paragraphs provide only a brief examination of why science fiction is different from fantasy and, thus, what separates the Arthurian elements of *SG-1* from their much earlier (medieval) iterations. In doing so, this chapter also establishes part of what enables science fiction to incorporate features from other genres, including fantasy.

For many, the separation of science fiction and fantasy appears clear; for others, the two genres are on an effectively equal footing. It is informative here to look at the reasons put forward to differentiate science fiction from fantasy. In the view of science-fiction author Isaac Asimov,

> To distinguish between the two major varieties of surrealistic fiction, I would say that the surreal background of the story in science fiction could, conceivably, be derived from our own [world] by appropriate changes in the level of science and technology ... Fantasy, on the other hand, portrays surreal backgrounds that cannot reasonably be supposed to be derived from our own by any change in the level of science and technology. (Or if they can be so derived, given enough ingenuity, the author does not bother to do so—as Tolkien scorns to try to fit Middle Earth anywhere into human history).[2]

Asimov begins with a point of similarity that joins the genres—their unreal settings—but he proceeds to make the distinction a matter of whether science and/or technology is used to justify or to ground departures

from lived reality. This also constitutes a basic rendering of Suvin's concept of science fiction as "cognitive estrangement"[3] in that although there are some unreal (estranging) elements in the narrative, these are ultimately related to the reader's sense of reality through scientific and technological justifications.

The connection with scientific or technological change and developments opens into discourses of possibility. In describing the "formal or abstract distinctions" used to broadly separate fiction, H. Bruce Franklin provides a useful taxonomy: "On one side lies fantasy, the realm of the *impossible.* On the other side lie all forms of fiction that purport to represent the *actual,* whether present or past. Science fiction's domain is the *possible.*"[4] Typically, the sense of the impossible associated with fantasy involves some kind of magical, supernatural, or otherwise inexplicable element that constitutes a conspicuous part of the text. Though both fantasy and science fiction depart from the actual, providing another basis for their assimilation, the nature of these departures is not the same. The central delineation explored here is that science-fiction elements are made to appear possible (and thus real) via scientific or technological explanations (however speculative or loose these may ultimately be). It is not the subject matter but rather the way that the subject matter (Arthurian legends in this case) is framed that determines the genre.

Taken as they are, medieval Arthurian legends could be considered fantasy owing to their inclusion of magical and supernatural elements. More specifically, they could be categorized in the subgenre of sword and sorcery based on the prominence of heroic adventure, sword-wielding heroes, magical wizards, and romance amid medieval scenery and settings. Likewise, the additions and updates, as well as many adaptations of the original texts, largely retain this generic position. Other adaptations do revive Arthurian themes and characters in a science-fiction-style way, such as DC Comics' *Camelot 3000* series[5] and Patricia Kennealy-Morrison's body of work known as *The Keltiad.* Additionally, Tom Henthorne contends that *Star Wars* (1977) "borrows freely from popular

tales about King Arthur."[6] This borrowing is only thematic and shows the variety of potential adaptations and linkages to Arthurian legend. Closer to the focus of this chapter, Bert Olton has noted the use of Arthurian material in *Lost in Space* (1965–1968), *Red Dwarf* (1988–), and *Babylon 5* (1994–1998).[7] According to Kristina Hildebrand, "Arthurian references abound even outside the [two] explicitly Arthurian episodes" of *Babylon 5*.[8] *The Time Tunnel* (1966–1967) and *Dr. Who* (1963–1989) also include overt Arthurian references, each in a single episode or story arc.[9] There are commonalities between all these examples and *SG-1*: the series does not rely solely on an Arthurian science-fiction world, has some overarching themes reminiscent of the legends, and directly mentions and includes figures and objects from Arthurian lore.

SG-1 AS ARTHURIAN SCIENCE-FICTION TELEVISION

Given the scope and timespan of the series, there is no simple yet wholly accurate description of *SG-1* except to say that it features the adventures of the eponymous team, originally and most famously comprising United States Air Force veteran Jack O'Neill (Richard Dean Anderson), astrophysicist and Air Force officer Samantha Carter (Amanda Tapping), archaeologist and linguist Daniel Jackson (Michael Shanks), and extraterrestrial warrior Teal'c (Christopher Judge), as the group journeys to other planets through the Stargate—a piece of technology that creates a stable wormhole connecting two points in space and time and that operates somewhat like a phone with addresses dialed into a computer program or device. Finding alien civilizations, some of which pose as or are the inspiration for figures from ancient myth and legend, and fighting against the Goa'uld provide the primary serial narrative for seasons 1–8. Intersecting stories about the Ancients—members of a much older human civilization that built the Stargates, as well as other technologies, and then evolved to a point where they "ascended" to become energy beings—also appear. The Ancients become central in the Arthurian-inspired final seasons.

The shift away from ancient mythology to Arthurian legend and broader medieval aspects coincided with a new start for the series. Because the show faced potential cancellation, season 8 effectively finished without the typical cliff-hanger to carry events and audience interest into the next season. At this stage of its history, *SG-1* was close to being rebranded with season 9's opening episodes, "Avalon, Pts. 1 and 2" (9.01, 9.02), initially conceived as a new pilot.[10] Seasons 9 and 10 also saw the inclusion of new central characters: Lieutenant Colonel Cameron Mitchell (Ben Browder), Vala Mal Doran (Claudia Black), General Hank Landry (Beau Bridges), and Dr. Carolyn Lam (Lexa Doig),[11] and a new primary antagonist: the Ori. Even returning characters Carter, Jackson, and Teal'c showed some changes and underwent development in these seasons. "Avalon" is as much about Mitchell's regathering the members of SG-1 (minus O'Neill) as it is about the initiation of a new narrative arc. In his first meeting with Landry, Mitchell is told that the former members of SG-1 are all variously occupied and no longer active members of the team. The explanations offered for the absence of previously essential characters would not have appeared out of place had the season 9 opener indeed become the pilot for a new franchise spin-off. Similarly, the subsequent cameos of Jackson, Teal'c, and Carter as each is approached in turn by Mitchell could have served just as effectively had he failed in, as he says in the episode, "getting the band back together." In due time, however, Carter, Jackson, and Teal'c all return to SG-1, and they set off in search of Arthur and Merlin.

With the reappearance halfway through "Avalon, Pt. 1" of Vala, who meets Jackson in "Prometheus Unbound" (8.12), viewers are given the first indication of Merlin's existence and nature within the world of *SG-1*. Under the pretense that she has a carved tablet that "leads to incredible Ancient buried treasure" and needs Jackson's help in finding it, Vala is escorted through the Stargate to Earth. Although he is initially reluctant and skeptical, circumstances force Jackson to assist, and together with Mitchell and Teal'c, they set about recovering the treasure. With the impromptu quartet gathered in his lab, Jackson sits at a computer

examining a database of the names of Ancients who returned to Earth thousands of years ago, finding that the name signed on the tablet—Myrrdin—is also on that list. Jackson's excitement at finding this particular name is met with only blank stares and silence, leaving him to explain that Myrrdin is more commonly known in English as Merlin. This revelation leads to a brief exchange between him and Mitchell in which Jackson espouses his belief that Merlin was one of the Ancients who came from Atlantis. When subsequently delivering a summary of Arthurian legend to Landry, Mitchell, Teal'c, and Vala, Jackson returns to the Ancient connection in describing Arthur's death as a possible ascension at a real Avalon. Here, Jackson is not merely mentioning Merlin but also acting as the conduit through which he is reinterpreted as a science-fiction figure.

Within Jackson's assessment viewers see the conjunction of legend with *SG-1*'s own backstory: Arthur's dead but not-dead status within the tales is related to ascension, or evolution to another plane of existence as a being of pure energy. Jackson himself is helped to ascend by another Ancient in "Meridian" (5.21) and subsequently retakes human form in "Fallen" (7.01), establishing the possibility that an ascended Arthur could likewise return. Responding to a question from Teal'c about the general noninterventionist rules of the ascended Ancients, Jackson posits, "It's possible Merlin was not actually ascended himself but was, in fact, just a human far along the evolutionary path." In line with the science-fiction genre, the knowledge and powers that Merlin possesses are thus explained in terms of his having evolved beyond normal human ability and being a member of an advanced extraterrestrial civilization rather than a mystic or wizard.[12] As Landry becomes impatient, wondering what all this has to do with the prospective treasure, Avalon itself is given greater significance by Jackson, who says,

> There are a number of conflicting interpretations, but certain threads point to the Knights of the Round Table gathering great treasures from the far corners of Arthur's domain and hiding them in a magical stronghold at Avalon.

Citing Glastonbury Tor as the purported resting place of Arthur and a site associated with Avalon, Jackson proposes they search for the treasure there. At the conclusion of the briefing-room scene, viewers are shown Jackson, Mitchell, Teal'c, and Vala aboard Earth's first spaceship—the *Prometheus*—as they discover hidden chambers and tunnels, previously concealed by Ancient technology, beneath Glastonbury Tor.

Using the Ring Transporter (another piece of Ancient technology), team members are sent from the *Prometheus* down into the catacombs. In a darkened cavern, they approach a plinth on which appears a sword, its blade embedded in the rock pedestal. When Mitchell remarks that it is "a sword in a stone," Vala (apparently unaware of this facet of Earth-based legend) questions what that actually means. Again, Jackson provides some exposition, stating, "King Arthur once pulled a sword from a stone as proof of his righteousness and royalty." He then corrects Mitchell, who mistakenly identifies the sword in the stone with Excalibur. After a failed attempt by Mitchell to lift the sword, lights begin to illuminate a space behind the plinth, and a translucent image appears of an old man with long white beard, holding a staff and clad in robes, and grandiosely declares:

> Welcome ye Knights of the Round Table—Men of *Honor*, followers of the path of righteousness. Only those with wealth of knowledge, and truth of spirit shall be given access to the underworld—the storehouse of riches—of *Ambrosius Aurelianus*. Prove ye worthy, and ***all*** shall be revealed.

The figure itself is reminiscent of many popular visualizations of Merlin, and as Jackson's earlier comment does, these words invoke images of medieval knights as valorous and honorable.[13] The message prompts Jackson to remark, "Certain scholars have speculated Aurelianus and Arthur were one and the same."[14] Within the world of *SG-1*, the two figures are indeed conjoined, Aurelianus effectively providing a historical Arthur. The team members separate into pairs—Mitchell with Teal'c, Jackson with Vala—to check the tunnels radiating from either side of

the cavern. Each pair comes across chambers that seal upon entry and contain puzzles. When the puzzles are successfully solved at the start of "Avalon, Pt. 2," all four return to the central cavern, where Mitchell is now able to draw the sword from the stone. Upon his doing so, a holographic knight immune to gunfire and able to cause immense pain via slashes of his sword appears to duel with Mitchell. Once he has defeated the hologram and all the tests are over, treasure fills the cavern. Among the wealth of golden and bejeweled objects is a book describing the history of the Alterans (the actual name of the race previously known only as the Ancients) and a device enabling long-range communication that proves integral to the ongoing narrative, as well as to the spin-off *Stargate: Universe* (2009–2011). However, this also marks the departure from Arthurian references in "Avalon, Pt. 2," and the remainder of the episode, along with "Origin" (9.03), sets up the Ori as a malicious group of ascended Ancients.

As is sometimes the case in science fiction, not only have earlier stories been adapted and made to suit the genre by the writers, but these same tales are also reinterpreted along science-fictional lines within the text itself. The overriding view of myth and legend from the past in *SG-1*, as expressed internally within the text by characters, is that these are articulations of actual events wherein reality was seen as having supernatural or magical overtones owing to the prescientific culture of the people observing what happened.[15] That approach is based on the events of the *Stargate* (1994) film from which the series was adapted, where a team encounters an alien entity masquerading as (and possibly the partial inspiration for) the ancient Egyptian god Ra (Jaye Davidson).[16] Subsequently, a host of various faux deities (the villainous ones being from the same Goa'uld race as Ra) is discovered. The same rendering is clearly evident regarding Arthurian legend.

It is worth considering here that even when Arthurian material is not present, seasons 9 and 10 focus principally on medieval settings. Early episodes establish the world in which the Ori followers live as one heavily

reminiscent of popular images of the Middle Ages, equipped with largely credulous peasant villagers, religious zealots, a belief system and culture built around a holy book, special representatives of the faith titled priors, and eventually a "crusade" against the unfaithful. When contrasting film and television, Andrew Elliott makes a salient point in observing that

> unlike their cinematic counterparts which create a "disposable" Middle Ages, [television] serializations must invoke a believable medieval world to which they will return on a weekly basis. These "worlds" (or forums) must provide sufficient flexibility to incorporate numerous themes and plots, while creating in the process a series of characters that will interest audiences enough to follow their adventures.[17]

Throughout production, *SG-1* incorporated a high degree of serialization, evincing Elliott's point well. Both the Arthurian story arc and the conflict with the Ori and their followers provide serial narratives that allow a richly layered medievalism to be articulated through seasons 9 and 10. Multiple subthemes and plots are explored within these depictions, including the impact of religiosity on intellectual freedom, the role and status of women in medieval societies, and the presence of contradictions between professed belief and actual behavior.

Arthurian Figures and Objects

The reason why Arthurian legend can be so readily adapted provides interesting insights. As Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer point out, "Arthurian legend makes the minimum demand for historical accuracy, and so gives greater imaginative freedom to the later writer."[18] Indeed, the same could be said of the other mythological narratives that *SG-1* adapts. Lack of a historical reality allows new authors to take great liberties with the material, including creating elaborate science-fiction-style versions of it.[19] Alan Lupack gives another reason for the longevity and persistence of Arthurian legend, observing, "Although Arthur ... is

the focal point of the tales, the Arthurian legends are in fact a complex of narratives with a wide array of stories and a large cast of characters."[20] Thus, the legends offer multiple types of story and several well-known figures to draw upon. That assessment fits *SG-1*, in which Arthur himself is mentioned but never actually appears, and greater prominence is given to Merlin and some of the general aspects of Arthurian narrative, with SG-1 filling in for Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table by receiving guidance from Merlin, questing, and seeking the Holy Grail.

The audience's next exposure to elements of Arthurian narratives comes in "Arthur's Mantle" (9.18). Here viewers are told that more items of interest—including a dark-gray object that looks like a jagged, D-shaped computer keyboard and several ragged old books—were also "recovered from the cave under Glastonbury." After Carter and Mitchell seemingly disappear, the object is discovered to be a device that Merlin used to occupy an alternate dimension in order to hide his research. Through the Arthurian references he finds in the books, Jackson concludes that the device is the factual basis for Arthur's cloak of invisibility:

> According to legend, the mantle makes the user *invisible*. Now given what I've read and what's happened today, I'm guessing it wasn't literally a cloak at all ... Medieval historians could well have attributed the powers of the device to a cloak simply because they didn't understand it.

He also reasons that the writers of the Arthurian legends "could have accredited [the mantle's] recovery to Arthur out of deference to the king who was in power at the time," when in fact it was probably "Merlin who actually built the device." This explicitly displaces Arthur from centrality, illustrating that the king need not be the key figure in adaptations of the legend. What one is left with is the science-fiction rendering: a magical cloak, divested of both its supernatural qualities and its medieval symbolism, becomes a piece of technology that uses the long-standing science-fiction concept of shifting to another dimension and thus being out-of-phase—effectively invisible and intangible—to

(most of) one's previous surroundings. Data logs contained on the device give information about Merlin's retaking human form in order to build a weapon to destroy ascended beings. As widespread war with the Ori and their followers looms, the decision is made at the end of "Crusade" (9.19) that SG-1 will track down Merlin's weapon. Using the gate address found in the logs, the team travels to the planet where it was supposedly left.

"Camelot" (9.20) opens with SG-1 already off-world, discussing the possible nature of Merlin's weapon while approaching a medieval-style village. Any doubts that they have found the right place are quickly dispelled by the sighting of another sword in a stone and the appearance of a well-dressed man who introduces himself as the town's governor (John Noble) and welcomes them to Camelot. From the governor and Antonius (David Thompson), the village historian, SG-1 learns that the villagers await the return of Arthur. Confusion about the "future home" notion prompts an explanation from Antonius that sees *SG-1*'s Arthurian backstory departing from its legendary sources: rather than being mortally wounded at the Battle of Camlann, "Arthur *defeated* Mordred ... after which he and his knights set off to find the Sangraal."[21] Jackson is quick to point out that the Sangraal is "the Holy Grail" before Antonius continues to assert the eventual return of Arthur. When Jackson asks about Merlin, his question prompts an immediate change of countenance in both Antonius and the governor, leading to a long pause before the latter excuses himself. Antonius informs SG-1 of the negative reputation that Merlin has in the village as "a wizard of darkness" and of the continued existence of the "library where he practiced his strange arts." Naturally, the SG-1 team is eager to be taken to this place but is warned off by Antonius because of a "powerful curse" involving the Black Knight. As viewers subsequently discover, the Black Knight is seen by the villagers as a magical curse placed by Merlin to dissuade entry into his library. The villagers' interpretation of the Black Knight is akin to supernatural versions of the figure, such as those found in *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion* (*Yvain, le chevalier au lion*), by Chrétien de Troyes (ca. 1170s). In line with SG-1's tendency toward naturalistic explanations, team members

reason that this knight is probably similar to the hologram at Avalon, thus providing another internal instance of reinterpretation.

Eventually, Antonius is persuaded to help, and they enter Merlin's library that night. Through the darkness they see a cobweb- and dust-covered room, scrolls piled over tables, shelves packed with books, and other arcane objects—all the expected trappings of a medieval wizard's study. Once the candles are lit, Jackson looks through one of the books, finding "a reference to Merlin's prophetic abilities," which Carter interprets as a possible sign that time-travel technology may be nearby.[22] Here again is an immediate science-fictional interpretation: seemingly impossible abilities are neither given direct credence nor rejected outright, being instead viewed as technologically enabled feats. Mitchell inadvertently discovers a secret passage to another chamber with an "Ancient control device" situated at its center. Whereas the first room maintains the illusion of being a part of a medieval legend, the other firmly shows an unreal element, but one that places it in science fiction. The team's presence in this chamber results in the appearance of the Black Knight in the village, where he kills Antonius and assaults other villagers—causing a loss of public support for SG-1. Ultimately, it is left to Jackson to attempt to find the access code for Merlin's control device while Mitchell battles the knight. Despite successfully activating the device, causing treasure and another hologram of Merlin to appear in the chamber, Jackson is forced to destroy the device's control crystals to stop the Black Knight.

Unlike the hologram at Glastonbury, this recording identifies itself as Merlin before giving a clue to the location of his weapon in the form of a riddle. Jackson deduces that the riddle refers to the pendant around Merlin's neck, as depicted in all illustrations within the library and on his hologram but, crucially, "Not in *any* reference material back on Earth." After an unsuccessful search of the treasure, he and Mitchell ask the governor, who indicates that the pendant is the Sangraal, "also known as the blood stone." Jackson quickly notes, "Of course, *sang*—blood—

red for the color of the jewel." The *blood stone* title alludes to readings in the style of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (1982) without resorting to the connotations having anything to do with blood (or bloodlines) in a literal sense. Channeling the likely reaction of some viewers, Mitchell interjects to say, "We're talking about the Holy Grail ... Every movie I've seen—that's a cup." As Jackson states in response,

> 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 ... earlier accounts described it variously as a dish or platter or, in the case of von Eschenbach and other Eastern-influenced chroniclers, as a stone that fell from the heavens.

Here, Jackson's account provides an accurate rejoinder to popular conceptions of the Holy Grail. Noting that the Grail-as-cup idea was introduced to Arthurian legend around the end of the thirteenth century by Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathe*, Lupack has similarly pointed out that Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (c. 1200–1210) "presents the Grail as a stone."[23] In this instance, *SG-1* deviates less from the corpus of Arthurian tales than from appearances of the Grail in adaptations such as *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989).

The final Arthurian aspects of "Camelot" see the governor telling Mitchell and Jackson that the Sangraal cannot be found among the treasures.[24] He informs them that Arthur and his knights left in search of it for "three distant lands mentioned in Merlin's prophecy: Castiana, Sahal, and Vagonbrei," pursuant to the science-fictional adaptation, these are not actually distant lands but rather alien worlds. Although none of these has direct corollaries in Arthurian legend, they cue up the next phase of the quest and again put SG-1 into the place of Arthur and his knights on a quest for the Holy Grail.

A QUEST TO THE END

In season 9 the interactions with Arthurian characters are indirect, occurring through the discovery of objects mentioned in those legends or in retracing the footsteps of those characters. Arthurian references in season 10 start relatively similarly with "Morpheus" (10.02). Through a postulated connection to Welsh legends about Sir Gawain, Jackson is able to find the gate address to Vagonbrei in the documents taken from Merlin's library. Traveling to this world, SG-1 finds a desolate and empty village. Exploring the village records, Jackson discovers "some ancient lore tied to the area" claiming that "a cave overlooking the village was once home to Morgan le Fey." He explains her to Teal'c as "a powerful sorceress, King Arthur's half-sister, and an adversary of Merlin." This account suggests the influence of Thomas Malory's version of Morgan from *Le morte d'Arthur* (1485). Teal'c and Jackson speculate that she was probably an ascended Ancient like Merlin and, based on their legendary conflict, also responsible for hiding the Sangraal. After one team member mysteriously falls asleep, the others subsequently discover that a microscopic parasite, one that causes its hosts to sleep and then die, was responsible for killing off the inhabitants of the village.[25] The same inhabitants believed the virus to be a curse placed upon them by Morgan "for revealing her whereabouts when King Arthur and his knights came looking for her." At the end of "Morpheus," with the team back on Earth and cured, Jackson reveals that he found a reference to Atlantis in the village records.

In a crossover featuring key characters from each series, SG-1 travels to Atlantis in "The Pegasus Project" (10.03) to continue the search. This episode also signals the beginning of more direct contact between SG-1 and Arthurian characters. Searching Atlantis's records, Jackson and Vala interact with the city database's "holographic interface"—a luminescent three-dimensional image of a woman veiled in light. Impatient with Jackson's systematic approach to searching, Vala demands that he ask the question directly. When he does, the answer provides two new planet

names bearing no linguistic similarity to Castiana or Sahal and their respective gate addresses. Greatly surprised, and with suspicions that the hologram is not what it seems, Jackson initiates a series of inquiries that result in the revelation that the interface is actually the ascended Morgan le Fey (Sarah Strange). She proceeds to narrate some of the history of her people, including the nature of the earlier conflict with Merlin and the fact that she was sent by the other ascended Ancients "to observe and, if necessary, to stop him." They are also told that Morgan, going by her Ancient name, Ganos Lal, designed the database program. Hence, her human visage and the hologram look the same, allowing Morgan to take its place in a ruse intended to help them while getting around the nonintervention laws of her fellow ascended Ancients. Setting aside earlier doubts about whether the mythical adversary of Merlin will actually assist them, Jackson passionately appeals for more help due to the threat of the Ori to not only biological life but also ascended beings. Just as Morgan is about to provide further information, her voice cuts, and the image is pulled back into a stream of light, indicating that she has been stopped by the other Ancients.

Viewers are informed at the start of "Insiders" (10.04) that nothing of use was found on either Castiana or Sahal. Instead of actually offering the site of the Sangraal, however, the three planets provide the first part of another puzzle, indicating that the actual planet is the only gate address that can be created from symbols of the addresses for Castiana, Sahal, and Vagonbrei. When this is realized in "The Quest, Pt. 1" (10.10), the SG-1 team travels to that planet and finds another village whose "culture and level of technology look similar to ... Camelot." Villagers tell them that the Sangraal is supposedly hidden in the surrounding area and send them to the village archives for information. There they find Osric (Rod Loomis), the keeper of the archives, who shows them a "parchment reportedly left behind by Morgan herself." When Ori soldiers attack the village and burn the archives, Osric offers to lead them to the Sangraal. Technological traps—the factual basis for the villagers' legends of a curse—are encountered, as is a series of tests meant "to weed out

those [Morgan] deemed unworthy." As with the other "curses," these are not wholly illusory but rather products of science and technology instead of magic. Upon passing all the tests, SG-1 finds not the Sangraal but Merlin, frozen in his human form within an Ancient stasis pod. Jackson remarks to Vala:

> It's amazing how similar this is to the myth ... supposedly, Morgan trapped Merlin in a cave and left him frozen there for all eternity. Only in reality, I think she was trying to protect him ... maybe Morgan did destroy the Sangraal ... she probably figured she had no choice, if she didn't do it the other Ancients would have just sent someone else ... [but she] preserved the one man capable of building it again.

Here one finds both an echo of Arthurian legend and an overturning of the same tales, with Morgan's status as the antagonist called into question. Although Morgan was similarly removed from "being the primary evil force" in the television miniseries *Merlin* (1998),[26] there is a vast difference between that adaptation and her appearance in *SG-1* as an articulate and active participant in the narrative, especially in the diegetic past within what amounts to the series' own version of Arthurian legend. Once he awakens, Merlin mistakes some of the SG-1 team for Arthurian characters: Carter as Guinevere, Mitchell as Percival, and Jackson as Galahad, misidentifications that serve to further associate SG-1 with Arthurian figures. After hearing about the situation from Jackson, Merlin agrees to help and begins assembling another Sangraal. Weakened from having been too long in stasis, Merlin is forced to transfer some of his knowledge, memories, and consciousness to Jackson via another of the Ancient devices in the cave.

The subsequent appearances of Merlin and Morgan have little further to do with Arthurian legend: Merlin returns via Jackson, and the weapon is finally completed, resulting in the destruction of the Ori ("The Shroud," 10.14), and the still-ascended Morgan returns in *Stargate: The Ark of Truth* (2008).

Conclusion

Converting myth or legend to science fiction (both in fiction and as pseudohistory) is reasonably common, but *SG-1*'s adaptation of Arthurian legend differs in specific ways. One point that distinguishes *SG-1* is that it is highly explicit in terms of internally documenting the shift from fantasy to science fiction. That is to say, viewers actually see characters within the narratives reinterpret the significance and details of Arthurian legend. Additionally, the tales are not reimagined wholesale or in relative isolation. Rather, the legends and characters are put into an existing universe, subject as much to *SG-1*'s diegesis as to the science-fiction genre. This extends them by building new connections. Furthermore, the tales unfold and are actively discovered through a process of historical investigation. Long-form serial narrative, accommodated by the medium of television, facilitates the presentation of this process. Overall, *SG-1* takes Arthurian legend from sword and sorcery to *sword and science*: processed through science-fiction genre conventions and *SG-1*'s own mythos, magic is remade as science and technology, and the events of Arthurian legend are retold as interactions between advanced aliens and medieval humans.

SG-1 does much more than simply mention or include Arthurian materials, and the series' remolding of earlier tales into a science-fiction narrative has broader significance. Firstly, it serves to show the impact of science, with its attendant naturalistic understandings, on the imaginative landscape as well as on how human beings conceive of both the past and the present. Shifts of content from fantasy to science fiction are indicative of larger cultural moves within the West away from an unproblematic acceptance of magic and the supernatural as parts of lived reality (or even as integrated and entrenched parts of an imagined past). Secondly, the series allows viewers to see an active case of adapting fantasy into science fiction. Rather than simply being itself a reinterpretation of Arthurian legend, the series reinterprets this body of lore within its own narrative by using the text as a means of articulating the change from fantasy to

science fiction. Scholarship on adaptation largely concerns the reworking of texts across media or across cultures, giving little direct attention to changes from one genre to another. The case of *SG-1* demonstrates another aspect of the adaptation process wherein the same source material can be fundamentally altered through adaptation across genres.

This examination has demonstrated the changes in genre from fantasy to science fiction that illustrate how malleable Arthurian legend can be. Lack of a clear, singular guise to most characters and the absence of a historical reality avails Arthurian legend of retellings and, indeed, the alteration of genre. That alteration also reflects a shift from medieval mindsets to the naturalistic and scientific perspectives more closely associated with the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. *SG-1* narrativizes these changes by depicting interactions between contemporary Western civilization and medieval societies, as well as their respective interpretations of phenomena. The openness of Arthurian legend is complimented by the openness of *SG-1*, which was originally built on a model of remaking mythical and legendary narratives as science fiction. This makes the series a significant and useful case study in examining twenty-first-century adaptations of past literature, including the medieval tales of King Arthur, Merlin, and the Knights of the Round Table.

Notes

1. Egyptian and Nordic being the most prominent; Greek, Chinese, African, and Phoenician also appear.
2. Asimov, *Asimov on Science Fiction*, 17–18.
3. Cf. Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre."
4. Franklin, "What Is Science Fiction—And How It Grew," 23.
5. With regard to this conceptualization of genres, these comics straddle the boundaries through their inclusion of magic alongside futuristic settings. Thus, they display science-fiction iconography more than they do science-fiction ontology.
6. Henthorne, "Boys to Men," 78.
7. Olton, "Was That in the Vulgate?," 89.
8. Hildebrand, "Knights in Space," 102.
9. Despite the many examples that can be found in science-fiction television alone, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to Arthurian television in comparison to film.
10. The new title would likely have been *Stargate: Command* had the decision not been made to continue the series as *Stargate: SG-1*. Garcia and Philips, *Science Fiction Television Series, 1990–2004*, 314.
11. Mitchell becomes the new (nominal) leader of SG-1; Vala subsequently joins the team after having been a recurrent character through season 9; Landry becomes the new head of Stargate Command, and Lam takes over as the base's chief medical officer. These changes are conspicuous given the earlier prominence and longevity of the characters they replace.
12. The use of (artificial) evolution to explain paranormal abilities is further established through these seasons of *SG-1*, especially in "Prototype" (9.09).
13. Similar references to the Knights of the Round Table and those questing for the Holy Grail as noble recur throughout the relevant episodes. From the perspective of medievalism—concerning how the Middle Ages are remembered rather than what they were actually like—in the *SG-1* depictions, knights retain their valorous guises, and medieval people are in the thrall of superstition.
14. It is unclear whether Jackson means to refer solely to recent scholars or also to much earlier figures such as Bede, Gildas, and Nennius.

15. This is conveyed in relation to the Asgard in "Thor's Hammer" (1.08) and later again in "Red Sky" (5.05). Arthurian legend itself subsequently receives the same treatment.
16. There are suggestions in the film and series that stories of the gods and goddesses existed before some of the aliens took on their fabricated identities; however, there is also the view, based on the interactions these aliens had with earlier human civilizations, that they are responsible for some of the traits and tales associated with the various deities. This is especially true of the Asgard, whose identities as Thor, Freyr, Loki, and other Norse figures stem from their actual names. Unlike the Asgard and some of the other pantheons, those pantheons occupied by the Goa'uld seem largely appropriated, meaning that these particular extraterrestrials are as culturally parasitic as they are biologically parasitic.
17. Elliott, "The Charm of (Re)making," 53.
18. Taylor and Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur*, 2.
19. When presented as factual (or potentially so), such variations often form the substance of pseudohistory and "ancient alien" theories.
20. Lupack, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend*, 1.
21. Either spelling—*Sangreal* or *Sangraal*—could be employed. However, the latter is closer to the pronunciation in *SG-1* and is therefore used here.
22. Viewers already know from earlier in season 8 that the Ancients were capable of time travel and that their records of the future could be used to feign prophetic powers, as occurs in "It's Good to Be King" (8.13).
23. Lupack, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend*, 448.
24. "Camelot" doubles as the season-ending episode. As such, parts of it are dedicated to producing a cliff-hanger moment around the full-scale invasion by the Ori followers. This dual focus is also the reason that Carter and Teal'c are absent from the final attempts to stop the Black Knight and decode Merlin's device.
25. The sleep sickness can be aligned with Malory, as Taylor and Brewer do in regard to Thelwall: "the instance of Arthur's being cast asleep by enchantment [in Thelwall] ... bears faint resemblance to the King's encounters with Morgan le Fey and Accolon in the *Morte Darthur*." Taylor and Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur*, 40.
26. Olton, "Was That in the Vulgate?," 95.

Section IV

Expanding the Medieval

Chapter 8

The Arabian Nights in 21st-Century Fantasy Fiction and Film

Kris Swank

> "O my sister, recite to us some new story, delightsome and delectable, wherewith to while away the waking hours of our latter night..."[1]

So begins a story in the book *One Thousand and One Nights*, or *The Arabian Nights*, a collection of Oriental folktales with roots extending back to ancient India and pharaonic Egypt. A small core of tales was first translated into Arabic under the title *Alf layla* (The thousand nights), probably sometime in the early eighth century. Over the years, more tales were added as the collection moved through Iraq, Syria, and Egypt[2] until Antoine Galland brought the *Nights* to Europe in the early eighteenth

century, adding even more stories from previously independent sources, such as "The Voyages of Sindbad," "Ali Baba," and "Aladdin."[3] The tales in the *Nights* encompass a great swath of Earth, from China and India to Morocco and France, many set during the apogee of the Islamic golden age, the reign of Harun al-Rashid, caliph of Baghdad (786–809). It is a place and time as iconic of the medieval Middle East as Camelot and Sherwood Forest are of medieval Europe.[4]

The fantastical elements in many of the tales—sorcerers, jinni, *rukh*[5]—make the *Nights* a natural source of inspiration for the fantasy genre. They also provide authors with a different environment from the endlessly reworked European feudal setting of so much post-Tolkien fantasy. Western storytellers from Stephen Benson Gautier and Edgar Allan Poe to DreamWorks Animation have imagined their own *Arabian Nights* stories, reflecting changing themes and values and thus joining the long tradition of reinterpreting, reimagining, and recreating these tales. An examination of *Arabian Nights*-inspired novels, short stories, television, and film produced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with comparisons to the medieval tales (as they have been translated into English), highlights some interesting trends in the ways the *Nights* are being retold today. Whereas some producers continue to recycle Orientalist stereotypes (flying carpets, harems, barbarism, etc.), others are consciously seeking to portray more historically representative characters and settings. The roles of women have evolved from the helpless objects of twentieth-century adaptations to the accomplished heroines of the twenty-first century, and this in many ways returns women to their medieval roots in the *Nights*. The roles of men have also changed as wealthy merchants and heroic princes have been replaced by rogues and geeks. Finally, the range of roles for nonwhite participants in twenty-first-century *Arabian Nights* adaptations is expanding. These trends are breathing new life into this eastern corner of the fantasy genre.

Alternate Orients

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, several fantasy novels used eastern lands as exotic settings that were geographically, ethnically, and morally distant from their Western centers. George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* (1996) and Jacqueline Carey's *Kushiel's Avatar* (2003), for example, begin in the "civilized" lands of a quasi-medieval Europe and send their characters off to peril in the backward, despotic, barbaric East. Packed with the sorts of clichés that Edward Saïd, in his landmark study *Orientalism* (1978), routinely found in Western writings about the East—"harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys, sherbets, ointments, and so on"[6]—these contemporary novels do little more than repeat centuries-old stereotypes of the Arab and Muslim world. Two ABC television series—*Once Upon a Time* (2011–) and *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland* (2013–2014)—import *Arabian Nights* characters into their European fairy-tale settings. As Cristina Bacchilega has noted, the genie of Agrabah (Giancarlo Esposito), the sole nonwhite character of any substance in the original cast of *Once Upon a Time,* is completely Orientalized. He "wears the obligatory turban; his colorful clothing, curly goatee, and accentuated eye makeup give him a mysterious, exotic, somewhat feminized look."[7] The single-minded villain of *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland* is the dark-skinned and sneering evil vizier Jafar (Naveen Andrews), a character adapted from the evil vizier Jafar in Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), who was himself adapted from the evil vizier Jaffar (Conrad Veidt) of the 1940 film *The Thief of Bagdad,* a figure that also inspired the evil vizier Jafar in the video game *Prince of Persia* (1989).[8] Both the genie and Jafar are Orientalist set pieces, crude caricatures endlessly recycled from one Western production to the next.

Alyssa Rosenberg, in her 2012 interview with fantasy author Saladin Ahmed, remarked, "I feel like Western readers are familiar with non-Western myths like djinns as they've been shoehorned into the edges of fairy tales, but they're not often at the center of the frame."[9] A few new works in the fantasy genre, however, are placing the East at the

center of the frame. Howard Andrew Jones's Chronicles of Sword and Sand series—beginning with the novel *The Desert of Souls* (2011)—is set in a magical eighth-century Baghdad based on historical events, characters, and situations. For example, the actual relationship between Harun al-Rashid and his vizier, Ja'far al-Barmaki,[10] creates the tension that launches fictional protagonists Asim and Dabir on a quest to retrieve a magical artifact. The villains in the series are frequently Europeans: Byzantines (who are called Greeks in Jones's books) are portrayed as shifty, greedy foreigners peeking in from the Western edge of the frame. Jones immersed himself in old texts, histories, and even translations of writings from the historical period.[11]

Saladin Ahmed's Crescent Moon Kingdoms series—only the first volume, *Throne of the Crescent Moon* (2012), has been published at the time of writing—is set in a secondary, fantasy world that bears a strong resemblance to the medieval Middle East. "This is very intentionally not historical fantasy per se, because it felt extremely constraining in ways I didn't want to be constrained," Ahmed said.[12] Nonetheless, he is using historical architecture, customs, and events (such as the Crusades) to give his series a believable, internal consistency. In addition to historical research, Ahmed also utilized his Arab-American heritage when writing the book:

> Growing up in Arab immigrant communities, my grandmother would, in halting Arabic, try to tell me stories. But also [I read] translations of the Koran and stuff like that. Some of it was from my heritage. And some of it is integrating bits of, dare I say, Orientalist use of quote unquote Eastern mythologies ... It's a very Arab-American novel in the mix of mythology that's in there.[13]

Jasmine Richards sought verisimilitude for the fictional land of Arribitha in her children's fantasy novel *The Book of Wonders* (2012). "It was really important to me that I got the smells, colours and the atmosphere of Arribitha right and so I did lots of travelling around the Middle East and North Africa [and] Zanzibar."[14]

The careful attention to historical detail exhibited by Jones, Ahmed, and Richards in their novels is largely absent from the stereotypes and anachronisms in *Arabian Nights* film and television fantasies of the twenty-first century. These productions instead rely on a visual shorthand to signal the "mysterious Orient." *Once Upon a Time* and *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland*, both based on the conceit that fairy tales are real, employ stock fairy-tale elements such as genies in bottles, magic lamps, and flying carpets. *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2010) features dark-clad assassins and mystic monks. The costumes in *The Adventures of Sinbad* (1996–1998) and *Sinbad* (2012) owe more to the fantasy Greece of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995–1999) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) than to any historical Middle Eastern culture.[15] The characters in these productions exist in an Orientalist neverland. Cristina Bacchilega states, "This kind of fantasy connects very little with the histories of the diverse peoples who produced *The Thousand and One Nights* or with the history of the tales as they migrated and impacted a range of cultures and literatures over the centuries."[16] It could be argued that it is pointless to seek historicity in fantasy films or novels; as Ahmed noted, sticking to history can constrain the creative mind. And so one is left with a fantasy subgenre that is, thus far in the twenty-first century, pulling in two opposite directions. Films and television, relying on a set of stock visual cues to quickly convey a sense of time and place, largely perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes and anachronisms. In contrast, fantasy novels, perhaps having the benefit of detailed narrative, have been able to develop more historically accurate presentations of the medieval Middle East, even when the setting is a secondary, fantasy world.

Alternate Heroines

In the medieval tales of *The Arabian Nights*, there are passive princesses who wait to be rescued—such as the sultan's daughter in "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp"—but there are also active heroines who use their minds and muscle to determine their own fates. Scheherazade is an

intelligent strategist who uses clever stories to convince her husband, King Shahryar, to stop executing the young women of his kingdom. It is said in the story that Scheherazade "had perused the works of the poets and knew them by heart; she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments."[17] In "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," Ali himself fails *twice* to recognize the thieves who had visited his house in disguise to kill him. It is his maidservant, Morgiana, who uncovers their deception and engineers their deaths. A mother and daughter are mistresses of cunning and trickery in "The Rogueries of Dalilah the Crafty and Her Daughter Zaynab the Coney-Catcher,"[18] and Princess Perizadah in "The Two Sisters Who Envied Their Cadette" completes a quest for three wondrous objects and rescues her captive brothers. In "Ali Nur Al-Din and Miriam the Girdle-Girl," Miriam has mastered "all the arts both of men and women,"[19] and she single-handedly slays thirteen men sent to capture her, including her three brothers.

But one would never know this side of *Arabian Nights* women from twentieth-century entertainment. The era's "sand and sorcery" films are filled with captive princesses being coerced into unwanted marriages or held prisoner by evil sorcerers. Their abiding characteristic is their need to be rescued. In the original *Prince of Persia* video game (1989), the princess is literally the object of the game. While the prince runs, jumps, and fights his way through the game's obstacles, the princess merely waits in her guarded chamber. The game is won when the prince rescues her. In the film *Arabian Nights* (1942), Scheherazade (Maria Montez) is a seductive dancer "dressed in nothing but flimsy, transparent bras and skirts,"[20] echoing the scantily-clad odalisques of so many nineteenth-century erotic Orientalist paintings. In *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947), Maureen O'Hara plays Shireen, whom Sinbad rescues from a harem. As James Iveniuk notes, despite her feisty bravado, Shireen is "denied the opportunity to ever do any damage with the tiny dagger she carries with her."[21] In the three twentieth-century Sinbad films of special-effects master Ray Harryhausen—*The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (1973), and *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977)—"the girl"

joins the hero on his quests, yet she is little more than a sweetly insipid prop, "never getting the opportunity for adventure, helpless while Sinbad does the work of rescuing them. Like the monsters that Sinbad fights, the woman is here another part of the stimulating scenery, and little more than an accessory for Sinbad: his prize."[22]

But all that changed on 13 March 1995, when Lucy Lawless first appeared as the warrior-princess Xena on the television series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* before beginning a show of her own. There had been women warriors in popular culture before her. Robert E. Howard's Red Sonja and C. L. Moore's Jirel of Joiry both debuted in short stories in 1934, and DC Comics' Wonder Woman first appeared in 1941. These were popular characters but not paradigm shifters, as Xena proved to be. Hoping to emulate Xena's popular success, producers rushed a spate of fantasy-action series to the small screen, all featuring women warriors in regular roles: *The New Adventures of Robin Hood* (1997–1999), *Conan: The Adventurer* (1997), *Roar* (1997), and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003).[23] An *Arabian Nights*–inspired series in this vein was *The Adventures of Sinbad* (1996–1998), which featured Maeve (Jacqueline Collen) and Bryn (Mariah Shirley) as women who wielded swords, high-kicked villains, and threw magical fireballs. Maeve (and Bryn after her) "was in many ways the flipside of the stereotypical Oriental woman that had been seen before. She was handy with a blade, and rescued Sinbad on several occasions during the run of the show."[24]

Though *The Adventures of Sinbad* was short-lived, it proved to be a watershed for women's roles in *Arabian Nights* fantasies: after that series, women routinely became less princess-bride and more warrior-princess. In DreamWorks' animated *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas* (2003), Marina joins Sinbad's crew to help recover the lost Book of Peace. Shortly after Sinbad claims that a ship is no place for a woman, Marina, as a woman, is the only person on board immune to the Sirens' song. Thus, she is able to save her male shipmates and steer them to safety, proving that a ship *is* a place for a woman. The live-action Disney film

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time subverts the objectified princess role of the original computer game upon which it is nominally based. Viewers first encounter Princess Tamina (Gemma Arterton) literally besieged in a tower by the invading Persian army, but it quickly becomes evident that Tamina is perfectly capable of rescuing herself as she grapples, kicks, and wields a blade, if not as proficiently as her male costar (Jake Gyllenhaal), with at least as much conviction. The recent British television series *Sinbad* features numerous active female characters in a variety of social roles: wise African princess, thief, bounty hunter, sorceress, and a self-made warrior-queen. None of them waits to be rescued.

In the Hallmark television miniseries *The Arabian Nights* (2000), Scheherazade (Mili Avital) uses rhetoric and psychology to cure her husband's madness and to rouse him to defend his realm. In the climactic battle scene, she even rides out at her husband's side. In Jones's novel *Desert of Souls*, Sabirah has a passion for learning and an eidetic memory: "she had learned the suras by the age of seven ... nearly mastered Greek in less than four months ... She has but to read something once to know it forever."[25] Her prodigious memory is clearly inspired by the literary Scheherazade. Furthermore, Sabirah refuses to be constrained in the harem and joins the male protagonists on their quest. Likewise, Zardi (short for Scheherazade) in Richards's *Book of Wonders* is another character inspired by the literary rather than the "harem-fantasy" Scheherazade. Zardi disguises herself as a boy and hires on with Captain Sindbad, seeking help to rescue her sister from the murderous Sultan Shahryar. During her quest, Zardi learns to crew the ship and outsmart adversaries. Ahmed's *Throne of the Crescent Moon* includes a number of tough and clever women: a talented alchemist, a savvy brothel keeper, and a shape-shifting warrior. The novel's sequel will feature Red Layla, a champion sword fighter who has already appeared in Ahmed's short story "Judgment of Swords and Souls" (2009). In a 2012 interview, Ahmed explained his approach to writing women characters:

> When you start telling stories, the very specific stories about Arab and Muslim women, and about their relationships with Arab and Muslim men ... There's all sorts of constitutive mysoginy [*sic*] in Arab culture, as there is in American culture. But the fetishization of that story is something I am very, very reluctant to add to. It's why I'm practicing what I preach in creating warrior women and badass grandma alchemists ... And I probably erred on the side of Xena.[26]

Ahmed is not alone. Intelligent and active female characters have become common in twenty-first-century *Arabian Nights* fantasies.

Alternate Heroes

Just as the portrayal of women has changed considerably from twentieth- to twenty-first-century Arabian fantasies, so too has the portrayal of men. First, outlaws are increasingly portrayed as charming heroes. Robert Irwin notes, "There are more stories in the *Nights* about princes and sons of wealthy merchants than there are about street-corner layabouts and petty criminals."[27] Yet there are still plenty of tales in *The Arabian Nights* about thieves, con men, and other assorted criminals. The *Nights*, Irwin wrote, "teem with *shuṭṭār* [sharpers, or con men] who get into scrapes but who, being infinitely resourceful, use artful dodges to get themselves out of those scrapes."[28] The most famous rogue is Ali Zaybak, who in "The Adventures of Mercury Ali of Cairo" repeatedly evades the police and matches wits with the crafty Dalilah. He eventually wins the caliph's admiration and a blessing for his marriage to Dalilah's daughter, Zaynab. "In Cairo, the legendary villains enjoyed the status of Robin Hood or Dick Turpin."[29] Ali wins admiration and a marriage blessing from the caliph just as the English Robin wins admiration and a marriage blessing from King Richard. Like Robin Hood's merry men, Cairo's racketeers, gangsters, and strongmen were hailed by apologists for their generosity to the needy and for delivering people from prison.[30]

Douglas Fairbanks, following a number of popular swashbuckler film roles—*The Mark of Zorro* (1920), *The Three Musketeers* (1921), and *Robin Hood* (1922)—wrote, produced, and starred in *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), an *Arabian Nights*-inspired film tailor-made to capitalize on his reputation as a dashing action hero. Fairbanks plays a charming street thief who employs derring-do and magic to save the kingdom and marry the princess. If the plot sounds familiar, it was recycled for Disney's animated *Aladdin*. Just as the Disney film has some affinity with Galland's early eighteenth-century "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp," it also adopts some twentieth-century *Arabian Nights* tropes. In Galland's tale, Aladdin is Chinese, not Arab, and he is not an orphaned street thief but a lazy boy who lives at home with his mother. Disney's Aladdin, like Fairbanks's thief, is both an orphan and an occasional shoplifter, and this orphaning continues through the twenty-first century, becoming a major plot point in the TV movie *Aladdin and the Death Lamp* (2012). The film *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1944) veers even further from its literary source, opting to use the English Robin Hood as its model instead. In the literary tale, Ali Baba is a poor woodcutter who steals from a band of cutthroat thieves and is saved by the actions of his clever servant, Morgiana. In the film version, Ali (Jon Hall) is a dispossessed nobleman who turns a band of thieves into altruistic freedom fighters seeking to rid their land of Mongol invaders. They even sing a song with the line "Rob from the rich, feed the poor," explicitly tying this film to the Robin Hood legend. This clever-rogue-makes-good theme continues and even intensifies in the twenty-first century. In *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, Dastan (Jake Gyllenhaal) is a charming street thief who is adopted by the king of Persia and saves the world.[31] In Ahmed's *Throne of the Crescent Moon*, the Falcon Prince (whom Ahmed created specifically as a Robin Hood–type figure) fights for common people and destabilizes a corrupt government.[32]

The character of Sinbad the Sailor provides an interesting illustration of the evolution of the "prince of thieves" archetype in twenty-first-century Arabian fantasies. In the medieval tales, Sindbad is not what

modern readers would consider a sailor at all; he is more of a middle-class traveling salesman who books passage on various ships to sell his goods from island to island. He himself knows nothing about sailing a ship. After many adventures, Sindbad returns home a wealthy man. In twentieth-century films, Sinbad experiences something of an upgrade. In the 1947 Douglas Fairbanks Jr. movie *Sinbad the Sailor*, Sinbad learns he is the heir to a kingdom. In *Captain Sindbad* (1963) and the three Ray Harryhausen Sinbad films, Sinbad is also a nobleman—and a true ship's captain now, rather than merely a passenger—a hero who can defend the realm against evil magicians and preserve the good government of the caliph. By the end of the century, though, Sinbad's social status had begun to slip. In *The Adventures of Sinbad*, he is no longer an agent of the state but its gadfly: as Sinbad sails from port to port (ostensibly to trade), he routinely overturns bad governments and installs good ones. He slips further still in twenty-first-century adaptations. In both the animated *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas* and Richards's *Book of Wonders*, Sinbad is a pirate. In Richards's book, he actually lures others ships onto the rocks so that he can plunder them, and he cheats his marketplace customers by selling fake artifacts. In the British series *Sinbad*, he is a ragged street hustler who is literally outlawed and spends the series on the run from authorities. No longer preserving good governments or toppling bad ones, the latest Sinbads operate completely outside the rule of law. Orphans, thieves, pirates, and outlaws: the twenty-first-century men of *Arabian Nights* fantasies are frequently portrayed as social outsiders.

Another trend in twenty-first-century Arabian fantasies is the emergence of men of science. Medieval Arabia was noted for achievements in mathematics, astronomy, literature, and art. In the eighth-century Baghdad of Harun al-Rashid, sciences and the arts flourished. The presence, then, of learned men in *Arabian Nights* stories is entirely plausible. However, the type of storytelling found in the *Nights* was generally disdained as fit only for women and children.[33] Irwin writes, "If a civilized Arab happened to have read the *Nights*, he probably kept quiet about it, since the vulgarity of that work's subject-matter and even more the

vulgarity of its style, rendered it unworthy of consideration."[34] If scholars paid little attention to the tales of the *Nights*, the tales, in turn, paid little attention to scholars. The tale of "Caliph Al-Maamun and the Strange Scholar" does feature the rare learned man, but it is one of the shortest tales in the collection.

When Hollywood embraced *The Arabian Nights* in the twentieth century, it transformed merchants and traders like Sinbad and Ali Baba into action heroes. In these films, higher learning is equated with silliness or black magic. In *Captain Sindbad*, the court magician Galgo (Abraham Sofaer) is a buffoon. In *Sinbad the Sailor*, the physician Melik (Walter Slezak) is malevolent, as are the most-learned characters in the three Ray Harryhausen Sinbad films. But in the twenty-first century, fantasy producers have resurrected the medieval Middle East's reputation as a center of scholarship and science, and they have introduced a new sort of heroic character into the *Arabian Nights* canon: the geek. The intelligent, rational, often socially awkward man of science has long been a fixture of the science-fiction genre. Notable examples include *Star Trek*'s Data, C-3PO in *Star Wars*, and *Stargate*'s Daniel Jackson. Scientific geeks have also recently made inroads in the fantasy genre. Neville Longbottom in the Harry Potter books (1997–2007) is a bumbler when it comes to magic, but he has an aptitude for horticulture that saves Harry and his pals on several occasions. The physician Gaius (Richard Wilson) on the television series *Merlin* (2008–2012), and the scientist-mathematician Pythagoras (Robert Emms) on television's *Atlantis* (2013) are two recent fantasy geeks.

The heroic geek has also been introduced into the *Arabian Nights* canon. The first such character was probably the inventor and scientist Firouz (Tim Progosh) in *The Adventures of Sinbad*. His rational knowledge saves ship and crew on more than one occasion, and among his inventions are such anachronistic devices as the hang glider, the Jacuzzi, sticks of dynamite, and mirror-focused laser beams. In the film *Sinbad and the Minotaur* (2011), the ship's crew includes historian and linguist

Nestor (Terrence Antoniak), and the British series *Sinbad* features the young ship's doctor and university scholar Anwar (Dimitri Leonidas). Furthermore, a central struggle in the first half of that series is a conflict between the scholarly emir of Basra and his brother, Akbari, a patron of sorcery.

This tension between science and sorcery is also evident in contemporary literature. One of the two main protagonists in Jones's Chronicles of Sword and Sand series is the scholar Dabir ibn Khalil, a polymath who is equally comfortable deciphering ancient languages and performing autopsies. Zardi's best friend in Richards's *Book of Wonders* is Rhidan, a boy who "normally had his nose in a book of riddles or mathematics."[35] The protagonist of Ahmed's *Throne of the Crescent Moon*, the doctor Adoulla Makhslood, is a voracious reader of all subjects, while the young court doctor, or "physiker," in Ahmed's short story "Hooves and the Hovel of Abdel Jameela" pits his medical skills against strange magic. Like their science-fiction precursors, these fantasy men of science are often socially awkward and geeky. Their role is to offer scientific explanations for magic and to combat superstition with reason. Perhaps the introduction of this character type was intended to appeal to "nerds," the presumed primary consumers of science fiction and fantasy. Or perhaps their role is to give a nod to the privileged position that science holds in twenty-first-century society. But regardless of the impetus, like the warrior woman, the scientist-scholar has quickly become a familiar trope in twenty-first-century Arabian fantasy.

Alternate Ethnicities

There has always been ethnic diversity among the background and bit players of *Arabian Nights*–inspired films and television, partly as a consequence of filming in locations such as Morocco and South Africa. But major roles throughout the twentieth century were played almost exclusively by fair-skinned actors and actresses from the United States

and Europe—from 1924, when Douglas Fairbanks played the thief of Baghdad to 2010, when Jake Gyllenhaal starred as the prince of Persia.

There have been notable exceptions. The 1940 film *The Thief of Bagdad* starred the Indian-born Sabu as the titular thief and African American actor Rex Ingram as the jinni. The Turkish Czech Turhan Bey was featured in several twentieth-century films, including *Arabian Nights* and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. But more often than not, ethnic diversity in twentieth-century Arabian fantasies was minimal and silent. A number of films include an African or African American actor who speaks no dialogue. Quinius (Bernie Hamilton) in *Captain Sindbad*, Rongar (Oris Eheruo) in *The Adventures of Sinbad*, and Seso (Steve Toussaint) in *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* are all mute. Whereas *The Adventures of Sinbad* was in the vanguard of creating empowered roles for female characters, the same cannot be said of its roles for nonwhite characters. Despite having been filmed in ethnically diverse Cape Town, South Africa, only a single episode in its two-season run—"Ali Rashid and the Thieves"—portrays black characters in positions of authority. Very few speaking parts were ever given to people of color, let alone those who were or could pass as Middle Eastern in this nominally "Arabian" series.

As previously mentioned, Giancarlo Esposito's genie of Agrabah was *Once Upon a Time*'s only significant nonwhite character, yet after the first season, he largely disappears without explanation. In the original 1989 *Prince of Persia* video game, the prince is a fair-skinned blonde. And while this phenotype certainly exists in the Persian population, Ahmed notes that as "a young Muslim gamer ... I reflected on the fact that the hero was blonde, while the evil swordsmen wore turbans."[36] Ahmed remarks that in Disney's *Aladdin*, goodness seems to be equated with whiteness. "Aladdin and Jasmine's personal style and phenotype are basically Ken and Barbie in Middle Eastern gear. But the corrupt vizier Jafar ... is dark brown with a camel-sized snout."[37] The light-skinned Jake Gyllenhaal was cast as the prince of Persia, but the film's villain was played by the darker-skinned Ben Kingsley. And though the casting call for *Once Upon*

a Time in Wonderland called for the romantic lead to be "Middle Eastern, attractive and soulful,"[38] producers cast the fair-skinned Peter Gadiot, and as the villain they cast the darker-skinned Naveen Andrews.

And this is not a matter of skin tone or facial features alone. Ilan Mitchell-Smith notes that nonwhite Disney princesses like Jasmine are given American accents, whereas villains such as Jafar are given accents that "represent the Old World and are, in most cases, laughable or antagonistic."[39] The documentary film *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2006), and the book of the same name by Jack Shaheen, argue that Hollywood routinely maligns Arabs. By studying over one thousand films from the early days of silent film to today's blockbusters, Shaheen found a consistent pattern of Arabs portrayed as villains. "There is no deviation. We have taken a few structured images and repeated them over and over again."[40]

But recently there has been change; a handful of twenty-first-century Arabian fantasies have cast people of color in positively coded major roles. The first mate Kale in the animated feature *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas* is black, voiced by African American actor Dennis Haysbert. Other crew members are represented as Asian, Hispanic, and European. *Sinbad and the Minotaur* stars Maori New Zealander Manu Bennett in the title role, and his first mate, Karim, is played by Zimbabwean-born Pacharo Mzembe. The British *Sinbad* cast black actor Elliot Knight in the iconic role, and the TV movie *Aladdin and the Death Lamp* stars Iranian Briton Darren Shahlavi as Aladdin. The film *Sinbad: The Fifth Voyage* (2014) features the Iranian American actor Shahin Sean Solimon as the first Persian actor to play the legendary Persian sailor in an American production. The shift is small and as yet largely limited to lower-budget productions, but it is an identifiable trend nonetheless. And those behind the camera and word processor are also more ethnically diverse—for example, authors Ahmed and Richards, and *Fifth Voyage* writer-director Solimon.

OUR LATTER NIGHTS

From the beginning of the *Arabian Nights* tradition, each successive era has recycled, adapted, and added its own stories to the canon that reflect the concerns of a specific time and place. The twenty-first century has been no different. But what might these contemporary *Arabian Nights* fantasies say about early twenty-first-century Western society? First, some fantasy authors are seeking to break away from the "feudal European" setting that became standard after Tolkien; some authors have not simply appended an exotic Oriental land to the eastern edge of their world maps but have centered those maps on versions of the Islamic golden age. In their efforts toward verisimilitude and historicity, these authors seek to expand the Western view of *The Arabian Nights* beyond stereotypes inherited from the nineteenth-century Orientalists, to reflect instead the diverse peoples and cultures that produced and inspired the *Nights* (as well as the diverse people reading and writing fantasy fiction today). There has also been an expansion of roles for and representations of women and people of color in these tales, reflecting contemporary concerns about gender and racial equality. The addition of the scientific geek to the canon may represent the privileged position of science over the supernatural in today's society, or perhaps the figure is a nod to the presumed primary audience of fantasy fiction. And finally, the romanticization of outlaws, thieves, and rogues in Arabian fantasies may point to a widespread dissatisfaction with government and mainstream institutions.

These contemporary societal concerns are reflected in the way the West tells and retells the *Arabian Nights* stories today. But the tales will continue changing to reflect new concerns tomorrow. Perhaps it will not be long before a female Sinbad captains her ship with an openly gay or lesbian couple among the crew. One thing is certain: Scheherazade will continue to weave her tales as new storytellers take up the challenge to reinterpret, reimagine, and recreate *The Arabian Nights* and give

audiences something "delightsome and delectable, wherewith to while away the waking hours of our latter nights."[41]

NOTES

1. Burton, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 1:24; the two Burton translations are used in this chapter not necessarily because of the quality of the translation but because of the comprehensive number of stories that Burton included and because his editions are widely available.
2. Irwin, *Arabian Nights*, 48.
3. Ibid., 15–17.
4. The Islamic Golden Age, the medieval era in the Muslim world, began with the establishment of the first Islamic state in 622; its end is traditionally marked by the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongol Hulagu Khan in 1258.
5. The *rukh*, or *roc*, is a gigantic bird of prey in Arabic and Persian lore said to be able to lift an elephant in its talons.
6. Saïd, *Orientalism*, 190.
7. Bacchilega, *Fairy Tales Transformed?*, 146.
8. Saladin Ahmed has asked, "Why is the evil vizier always a Jafar?" "Muslims," n.p.
9. Ahmed, "A Conversation," n.p.
10. Jones's Ja'far is presented not as the stereotypical evil vizier but as a real man caught in the dangerous politics of the caliph's court.
11. Jones, "Arabian Culture," n.p.
12. Ahmed, "A Conversation," n.p.
13. Ibid.
14. Richards, "Interview," n.p.
15. Both were television series very loosely based on Greek mythology and known for their revealing costumes and anachronistic details.
16. Bacchilega, *Fairy Tales Transformed?*, 152.
17. Burton, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 1:15.
18. Ibid., 7:145.
19. Ibid., 7:49.
20. Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West*, 72.
21. Iveniuk, "The Seventh Signification of Sindbad," 9–10.
22. Ibid., 12.
23. Although the film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), starring Kristi Swanson, preceded the creation of *Xena* by a few years, it did not have the cul-

tural impact of *Xena* or, later, of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series starring Sarah Michelle Geller. *Buffy* creator Joss Whedon reportedly credited *Xena* with blazing the trail for a wave of female action heroes. See Young, "What We Owe Xena," n.p.

24. Iveniuk, "The Seventh Signification of Sindbad," 14–15.
25. Jones, *Desert*, 133.
26. Ahmed, "A Conversation," n.p.
27. Irwin, *Arabian Nights*, 120.
28. Irwin, "Futuwwa," 167.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 164.
31. Although not shown in the movie version of *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, in the novelization of the film, an older Dastan reflects on his boyhood living in the streets, when "he survived by stealing food to eat," just as Aladdin does at the beginning of Disney's *Aladdin*. Ponti, *Prince of Persia*, 85.
32. Ahmed, "Fantasy," n.p.
33. Irwin, *Arabian Nights*, 81.
34. Ibid., 80.
35. Richards, "Interview with Jasmine Richards, 17.
36. Ahmed, "Muslims," n.p.
37. Ibid.
38. Bricker, "*Once Upon a Time*'s Wonderland Spinoff Scoop," n.p.
39. Mitchell-Smith, "The United Princesses of America, 219.
40. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 1.
41. Burton, *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 1:24.

Chapter 9

Moving Beyond Tolkien's Medievalism

Robin Hobb's Farseer and Tawny Man Trilogies

Geoffrey B. Elliott

In 2013 I presented a paper at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In it, I argued that the milieu of Robin Hobb's Farseer and Tawny Man trilogies is a Tolkienian fantasy setting made particularly authentic through its construction of the realm of the Out Islands. Being steeped in the Tolkienian tradition of fantasy literature myself—I had read *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* early, something I think typical of Anglophone fantasy readers—and recognizing that Hobb's milieu of the Six Duchies is itself an iteration of the Tolkienian fantasy tradition, I read the Out Islands as analogous to the Norse realm. As I heard the papers in the session before I was due to present, however, I realized that I had been in error. Although there is justification for reading elements of these islands as corresponding to the lands of the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Danes, a number of points in the text demonstrate far closer parallels between inhabitants of the Out Islands and the aboriginal

peoples of the Pacific Northwest than between them and the Vikings. There was no time then to adjust my work to the new realization, and I had to present the paper I had written as I had written it.

In the discussion after my session, however, and in the time since the presentation, I have come to realize that mainstream fantasy literature such as Hobb writes in her Realm of the Elderlings corpus operates from a certain set of cultural expectations embedded in Tolkien and passed along the tradition of which Hobb and many other fantasy writers partake. That the mention of a raiding island culture in a fantasy series immediately brings to mind conventional depictions of Vikings—and even prompts formal argument in favor of that impression—bespeaks a decidedly Northern and Western European-centric bias inculcated into the expectations of the general fantasy readership. Recognizing that there is more material available to fantasy literature than what Tolkien gave the genre and working to explore it allow for a broader conception of what fantasy literature can do. Given that fantasy literature is often the avenue through which readers begin to investigate the medieval, moving away from a narrow set of expectations of the genre permits a broader conception of what the medieval *can* be, helping to promote a cross-cultural understanding increasingly valuable in an interconnected and pop-culture-saturated world.

What follows offers two readings of the milieu of Robin Hobb's Farseer and Tawny Man trilogies. The first aligns with the expectations set up by the Tolkienian tradition of fantasy literature. The second moves away from that tradition, highlighting the Pacific Northwestern elements of the milieu and the greater degree to which they manifest in the Out Islands than do those more common to mainstream fantasy literature. Afterward, I discuss ways that the first reading and its correction constitute an example of ways that understandings of fantasy literature are conditioned and confined by the prevalence of the Tolkienian tradition in the genre and in other media. I then briefly discuss what moving beyond reflexive

recourse to *Lord of the Rings* as the standard measure of fantasy writing can offer.

The Conventional Fantasy Approach

Hobb's milieu partakes of the Tolkienian tradition, certainly. The Six Duchies' political structure follows the tropes of setting laid out in the Middle-earth kingdom of Gondor. In Tolkien's nation, a king or a hereditary steward (who is expected to be or to have been an active combat commander) rules, and people of noble birth govern lands and command troops, but the relationships among the commanders are only loosely delineated. Tolkien's prince of Dol Amroth holds a "normal" noble title, and he is clearly the ranking nobleman after the steward,[1] putting a prince after the ruler, but the other named leaders carry no titles other than *lord* and the not necessarily noble *captain*, and how they fall in terms of precedence is unclear.[2] In Hobb's duchies, a reigning monarch is assisted by a king- or queen-in-waiting; significant power is invested in the dukes and duchesses and less in the lords subordinate to them—who are of undifferentiated rank. As in Tolkien's world, then, the Six Duchies have an explicit hierarchy only at the highest levels; below the potentates, there is obviously social stratification, but it is not explicated in the text. There are also similarities in the militaries those nobles command. In both Gondor and the Six Duchies, soldiers wear mail and fight with axe, bow, staff, and sword, echoing depictions of prototypical medieval warriors: the Crusaders and the Knights of the Round Table, which both typically appear in such fashion. The duchies thus appear much as a refiguration of Tolkien's Gondor, and because Gondor is a refiguring of medieval England,[3] it follows that the realm of the Six Duchies is itself an analog of medieval England; the Out Islands thus become analogous to the lands of the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Danes. In the historical example, the seafaring peoples of what are now known as Angeln, Saxony, and Jutland came across the sea in conquest and settlement, intermarrying with the indigenous peoples and slowly

establishing a united kingdom (but not the United Kingdom), as John McWhorter has discussed.[4] The aggregate nation was afterward raided by its people's own seafaring cousins, some of whom also decided to remain in conquest and in settlement. In the fiction, much the same takes place; the history of the Six Duchies begins with Out Islanders' raids on verdant coastlands.[5] Even the ships used by the island raiders mimic Danish longships; vessels in the island style are clinker-built and of shallow draught, their hulls sealed against the seas with tar-covered rope.[6] The descriptions do call to mind the Viking raids that characterize English history leading up to and during the reign of Alfred the Great prior to the establishment of the Danelaw, arguing for reading Hobb's milieu as solidly embedded in the Tolkienian tradition of recapitulating medieval Europe—specifically, England.

Other parallels reinforce the notion. The languages, for instance, correspond closely. The common form of the Out Islands language is accessible to a Six Duchies speaker through careful listening alone,[7] as has been argued was true of Anglo-Saxon and the languages of the Danes.[8] Further, oral histories long remained current in England,[9] even as they inevitably shifted in retelling and new hearing, so those who kept them were doubtlessly regarded as of singular importance.[10] This is paralleled in the Six Duchies, where the keepers of oral histories are accorded honored places in public and formal gatherings.[11] Indeed, their presence is obligatory at diplomatic and legal functions in no small part because they exercise something of a notary function,[12] and they enjoy exception from many social mores.[13] In the Out Islands themselves, bards are the sole keepers of historical memory, recounting it in high poetic form.[14] In this the islands approach Anglo-Saxon scop-work, in which, as in *Beowulf*, a singer's work in unusual syntax is required to consecrate a hall or to fittingly entertain a doer of mighty deeds.[15] Further, the governing body of the Out Islands, the Hetgurd, partakes of the similarities of language and of the European to reinforce the Tolkienian appearance of the milieu. The name of the body and the titles of its members resonate with Anglo-Saxon words appropriate to the function of the Hetgurd.[16]

As a relatively egalitarian group focused on trade but concerned with the conduct of war,[17] and meeting in a commercial seaport instead of a military stronghold,[18] the Hetgurd evokes the Hanse.[19] It appears obvious, then, that Hobb's milieu follows the Tolkienian tradition, presenting an image of fantasy literature as contingent upon figurations of medieval Europe and going no further.

Overlapping Points and an Alternate Reading

Yet even some of the "European" features of the milieu frustrate the easy identification of the setting as solely a refiguring of medieval England and the Nordic lands. For example, the Six Duchies and the Out Islands prescribe something like *weregild*—a material or monetary price for a person that may be paid in redemption of wrongs done by that person —which appears in *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon law codes.[20] Maiming, murder, and rape can all be atoned for in goods or gold in both the Six Duchies and the Out Islands,[21] although failure to pay carries harsher penalties in the latter, and some crimes admit of no purchased penance.[22] Yet the practices also signal a regard for dualistic reciprocity such as is found among the peoples of the Pacific Northwest, about which the Tlingit scholar Nancy Furlow has written at length.[23] Although her statements are heteronormative, they do indicate particular regard for a dualistic vision of the world and humanity's place in it. She writes that "duality as expressed through reciprocity and balance is the central feature of Tlingit religious meaning," such that exacting repayment is required before matters can be considered settled and be allowed to pass.[24] Wallace M. Olson has echoed the comment,[25] adding that the nature of the expected repayment could also vary based on the relative ranks of the people involved, and that the penalties absent material repayment were quite harsh.[26] Thus, though the practice is like *weregild*, it is also like something else. It begins to frustrate an easy reading of the milieu as strictly Eurocentric in the Tolkienian tradition, even amid

features that seem to impede looking closely enough to move beyond the assumptions of genre.

That the peoples of the Pacific Northwest, rather than *only* the medieval peoples of the Nordic countries and England, would be a reference for Hobb is suggested by the author's biography. She is a long-time resident of the region, having lived in rural Alaska during her adolescence and adulthood and in the state of Washington later on; indeed, Hobb has cited her experiences in the region as informing much of her writing in the knowledge of both chores and people that they have afforded her.[27] It follows, then, that the aboriginal peoples of the Pacific Northwest, including the warlike Tlingit, Haida ("Vikings of the Northwest Coast"),[28] Tsimshian, and the many Athabascan (who can perhaps only marginally be included among the Pacific Northwest) would likely appear in some form in her works, in addition to the more "traditional" sorts of folk found in fantasy literature. It is a clue—or should have been, in my Kalamazoo paper—that the milieu needed a broader reading than I had given it, one that would exceed the conventions of genre.

More clues appear upon further consideration. For instance, the Pacific Northwest of the United States and Canada is a region dominated by water and marked by cold; it abounds in islands and rivers, and it hosts the shrinking ice of glaciers in Glacier National Park and elsewhere. Olson has commented on the receding presence of ice among the many islands occupied by the Tlingit, as well as upon the extreme motions of the tides.[29] In addition, Jay Miller has remarked that the area occupied by the Tlingit and Tsimshian peoples in Alaska is wet, mountainous, and fjord-cut in its archipelagic spread,[30] and David M. Buerge notes that "ice and sea continue to sculpt the land" where the First Peoples of the Pacific Northwest dwelt and yet dwell.[31] The geographic parallels appear in descriptions of the islands, although Hobb has exaggerated certain features to achieve literary effect. Her work describes the Out Islands as heavily glaciated and marked with fjords,[32] a characterization that seems to reflect the bitter Alaskan winters of Hobb's youth but also the rugged

topography of much of the Pacific Northwest coast. Similar are several comments about the near-total glaciation of the island of Aslevjal[33]—the context of at least one also bespeaks tidal motions like those Olson has reported take place in the Pacific Northwest.[34] Although such comments correspond to the Nordic countries as much as to the Pacific Northwest, the presence of something very much like a raccoon in the islands—a "robber-rat" the size of a large housecat, "masked like a ferret," with a "bushy striped tail" and seemingly dexterous front paws[35]—suggests that the parallel is to the Americas rather than to Northern Europe. It suggests that the tropes laid down by Tolkien do not suffice.

That Hobb's milieu exceeds the restrictions of the Tolkienian tradition by partaking of the Pacific Northwest is also indicated by the diet consumed on the Out Islands. Olson has noted that catching and processing fish, specifically salmon, occupied much of the Tlingit's time and that the Tlingit diet also included a number of sea plants, such as kelp, and seal oil used as Europeans use other fats.[36] Jay Miller has reiterated the point with a comment about the primacy of salmon and dried fish in the area's diet,[37] with which Leland Donald has agreed.[38] In addition, Ann M. Renker commented at length that the Makah people, relatively geographically close to Hobb's Washington residence, were oceangoing whalers who used whale oil extensively as a food product, adding that seals and sea otters were also used by the Makah as sources of food and other raw materials.[39] Clearly, then, the seas account for much of the traditional diet of the First Peoples of the Pacific Northwest—understandable, given the geography of the area, which is abundant though it sustains little if any agriculture. The same is true in Hobb's Out Islands. As her protagonist reaches them, he notes a number of vessels involved in the catching, processing, and sale of sea-derived food and goods, ranging from whales to seals,[40] making his first encounter in the islands one with the local cuisine and linking that cuisine to the kind observed among indigenous Pacific Northwestern people. Similarly suggestive is the food, which the protagonists finds is oily and fishy or tastes of seaweed.[41] It stands far removed from the agrarian underpinnings of Tolkien's milieu

and those of most of his successors, indicating that Tolkien's conventions are not always the best to use in reading fantasy literature.

A stronger indication that Tolkien's tropes of setting do not always suffice comes in the correspondence of Out Island familial structures to those of the Pacific Northwest. Among many of the original Pacific Northwest's peoples--the Tlingit, for example—the basic social organization is one of matrilineal family, lineage, clan, and moiety. Culture is "owned" by those groups; each has rights to particular songs, stories, and totemic crests that figure prominently in their artwork, as Miller has noted and Furlow confirmed.[42] Olson has added that crest-driven art pervades Tlingit material culture: the crests appear ubiquitously.[43] Further, children belong to the moiety and clan of their mother, as Miller has hinted,[44] Olson has stated,[45] and Furlow has encapsulated neatly.[46] Among the Tlingit, particularly, women deploy significant social power; Olson has remarked that, traditionally, women made ultimate trade decisions and determined the extent and nature of the kinship networks upon which clan and moiety depended.[47] Other Pacific Northwest peoples are less divergent in gender power, perhaps. Even so, the Tsimshian follow matrilineal practice,[48] Renker has highlighted the Makah as notable among Pacific Northwest peoples in allowing members of the tribe to select which side of their families (their mother's or father's) to identify with,[49] and Rodney Frey remarks that women, "able to freely speak at public gatherings, ... were able to exert considerable influence over public opinion."[50] Each suggests a prominence for women not found among Tolkienian-tradition works (indeed, the sexism in Tolkien's work is one of the chief complaints leveled against it), a prominence not typically ascribed to the historical medieval Europeans but one commonly noted as a pervasive practice of many pre-Columbian peoples in North America. Hobb has exaggerated the matrilineal structure of many Pacific Northwestern peoples in the Out Islands. The fictional people share with their real-world parallels hereditary transmission but extend the matrilineal to the matriarchal. That women absolutely rule the Out Islands is attested even in the midst of a Hetgurd meeting, agreed upon by all the island

men present.[51] Similarly indicative of female control—and consonant with descriptions of the Tlingit, particularly—is the confirmation of a trade arrangement between the Narwhal and the Six Duchies by the women, and the women alone, of the former.[52] Further revelations are the statements that "all things that are kept under a roof belong to the woman, as does all that comes from the earth which her mothershouse claims. Her children belong to her clan, and are commonly disciplined and taught by her brothers and uncles rather than by their father,"[53] and that "all land belongs to the women of the clan."[54] Thus, although the parallel is not exact, it is far closer to the Pacific Northwestern than to the Nordic, moving beyond Tolkien's paradigm despite corresponding to it in many places.

Also common among the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest is the manner in which the frequently matrilineal families were housed. The families and clans of many tribes dwelt communally in longhouses, typically proximal to the shoreline. Repeatedly attested is that the people within the houses arranged themselves by social status, higher-ranking individuals living farther from the door and those highest-ranked dwelling completely apart. Olson, Miller, and Coll-Peter Thrush[55] have all directly asserted the practice among Pacific Northwest peoples, while Renker has been joined by Deward E. Walker Jr. and Peter N. Jones in describing similar practices among other tribes of indigenous Pacific Northwestern peoples.[56] They are echoed in the Out Islands by the Narwhal mothershouse at Wuislington. The building is "intended to defy raiders who would come and go with a tide rather than to withstand a significant siege" and is amply decorated with the clan crest.[57] Inside, it is a largely open single hall containing three hearths, and the high-ranked people dwell on upper floors accessible only through a single stair at the far end of the hall from the entrance, and dual levels of benches and shelves serve for sleeping and storage for the others.[58] The description admittedly invokes the Germanic mead hall, but it also corresponds to what scholars have reported about the aboriginal peoples of the Pacific Northwest, reinforcing the social connections that mark the Out Islands

as analogs to indigenous North America. It reinforces also the idea that recourse to the Tolkienian tradition no longer suffices for understanding mainstream fantasy literature and what it says of and to the world for which it is written. Although it must still be considered, for it yet appears in the works that move away from it, and many fantasy works remain firmly in the mode Tolkien promulgated, other things must also be examined—as Hobb's milieu makes plain.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Even having worked through a reading of a fantasy text that moves away from overreliance on Eurocentric tropes, I find that I am still sometimes ensnared in a set of expectations that look to Tolkien first and, finding confirmation, seek no further. This is despite what I have seen as weaker parts of my own argument; there were places in my original paper that stretched toward the points I meant to affirm. That I had to struggle to make the arguments work should have served as an indication to me that they needed to be reconsidered, but I was so convinced that the Out Islands —home to a seafaring, raiding people in a mainstream fantasy series— were analogs of Viking lands that I never considered other applicable, pertinent ideas. And I could be partly justified in looking for the parallels; they are generic conventions of mainstream fantasy literature. Tolkien's foundational Middle-earth corpus clearly operates with a sense of the Nordic and Germanic about it. Andrew Higgins, Brent Landon Johnson, Colin Padja, and Leigh Smith have identified Anglo-Saxon, Icelandic, and Danish sources for various aspects of Middle-earth.[59] They have followed such critics as Tom Shippey, Edward Wainwright, Stuart D. Lee and Elizabeth Solopova, Verlyn Flieger, and Mark Atherton in doing so,[60] and even John Gough, disagreeing about the Germanic underpinnings of *The Silmarillion*, has acknowledged justification for asserting Northern European readings of Middle-earth.[61] Many other fantasy corpora make many of the same invocations. There is something of the Viking in initial descriptions of the Kargs in Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea books,

for example, with their blonde hair, fair skin, and shipborne raiding.[62] Her character names also partake of the Northern, as Christopher L. Robinson has remarked.[63] There is something of the Nordic raider, too, in the Greyjoys of George R. R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire*, with their slave-taking raiding, longships, and relative egalitarian rule.[64] Michael D. C. Drout has made similar claims about Susan Cooper's fantasy works, contending that they source the Anglo-Saxon to develop their milieu.[65] One of the offshoots of Tolkienian fantasy, the tabletop role-playing game, also heavily reflects an idealized medieval Europe; the first such game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, evolved from miniature war games focusing on the representation of medieval European armies—as the first chapter of this volume explains.[66] Another offshoot, digital role-playing games, also does so; Nintendo's *Legend of Zelda* franchise is among the more prominent instances. Other examples are easily identified, and they all lead swiftly to the understanding, the preexisting lens through which to look at texts, that reads fantasy literature as largely dependent upon the medieval in Northern and Western Europe and looks for its tropes in the verses of scop and skald and troubadour.

Having such materials in mind as I pored over the Hobb text, I came to enact in my reading something analogous to what Kofi Campbell terms in "A Clash of Medieval Cultures" the legacy of "Europe's pre-colonial positioning of Africa and blacks."[67] The early modern European colonizers approached the aboriginal North American peoples with ideas about the categories that were available and into which they could place them, allowing the preconceived notions inherited from the medievals to overdetermine their reactions to the people they found there instead of treating those they found as they found them. I approached Hobb's text with similar ideas about the categories available into which one can place the groups her book depicts. Because I had read Tolkien, who explicitly sought to present a legendarium embedded in the history of England, and many of Tolkien's successors, who follow his model and invoke many of the same tropes, I equated seafaring raiders and Vikings. This blinded me to other possibilities and forced me through contortions

of reasoning that I ought to have seen as wrong-headed earlier than I did. The circumscription of viewpoint emerges specifically *because* of Tolkien's prominence and the abundant scholarship that treats his work. Although Tolkien's work is worth reading and scholarship on it worth carrying out, his world forms an artificial limit—not imposed through deliberate action but still imposed, and I doubt that I am alone in having suffered from it.

I doubt also that I am alone in having come to the study of medieval literature through the fantasy literature in which it is commonly refigured. My studies of English-language Arthurian legend and other medieval English works came about because I had been intrigued by their successors in the writings of Tolkien and others, as well as by the films and games that grew from them; I enjoy such things immensely even now, so I take opportunities to learn more about them when I may. In conversation, a number of other medievalists have told me of similar experiences; they came to study the medieval through reading Tolkien and C. S. Lewis and through other media entirely. There is thus a dialogue between medieval studies scholarship and scholarship on medievalism, so that what happens in one bleeds over into the other. If it is the case that constructions of the medieval are problematic in medieval studies, as Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul have asserted,[68] then it is also the case that their recapitulations in medievalist works are problematic. If, as these scholars have remarked, application of the label *medieval* to non-European cultures is all too often a tool of oppression, whether as an overt assertion of cultural superiority by colonizers or as a tacit assertion of it through the perceived divide of *then* and *now*,[69] its application to fantasy cultures can be seen as reinscribing that oppression. This is particularly true when the presence of cultures that are called medieval but lie outside the Northern and Western European medieval are refigured to good effect, as in Hobb, but their afterimages are overlooked in favor of more "normal" readings (like mine and, doubtless, those of others).

Alternatively, and perhaps more usefully, the presence of refigured non-European medieval cultures in fantasy literature can be taken as an opportunity to expand and refine understandings of what it means to be medieval and how that being can be put to use in modern culture. Davis and Altschul have motioned toward the possibility of reclamation and legitimization through an expanded deployment of the medieval label.[70] Given the frequent interaction of medieval and medievalist studies, the latter can offer an avenue through which to enact that possibility. It can lead people to increasingly value the medieval, variously defined, not as a dearth of culture and excellence but as a period or series of periods that displayed greater understanding than modernity does of a number of things. It can search out the places in medievalist works where the atypically "medieval" is deployed, valuing it for its interactions with the more "traditional" medieval figurations, highlighting what the medieval that Tolkien refigured *and* the medieval that existed outside Europe can offer to their inheritors. That can, in turn, open more dialogue between scholars of the medieval and scholars working in other languages and cultures, promoting greater mutual understanding among scholarly communities that can perhaps be carried out into the broader world.[71]

NOTES

1. Tolkien, *Return of the King*, 152, 162.
2. Ibid., 45–47.
3. Elliott, "Manifestations of English Arthurian Legend," 18–20.
4. McWhorter, *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue*, 11–15.
5. Hobb, *Assassin's Apprentice*, 1.
6. Hobb, *Royal Assassin*, 319–321.
7. Hobb, *Fool's Fate*, 20–21.
8. Crystal, *The Stories of English*, 83; McWhorter, *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue*, 93.
9. Coleman, "Interactive Parchment," 64; Lanzendorfer, "Reader, Take Thy Adventure."
10. Bradley, introduction to *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, xii–xv.
11. Hobb, *Golden Fool*, 64.
12. Ibid., 202, 302.
13. Hobb, *Fool's Errand*, 37–38.
14. Hobb, *Golden Fool*, 55–56.
15. *Beowulf*, in *Beowulf with the Finnesburg Fragment*, lines 86–101 and 867–897.
16. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 63, 64, 163, 170.
17. Hobb, *Fool's Fate*, 129, 133–134, 145.
18. Ibid., 208.
19. Beerbühl, "Networks of the Hanseatic League."
20. *Beowulf*, lines 456–472; Halsall, "Medieval Sourcebook: The Anglo-Saxon Dooms, 560–975." http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/560-975dooms.asp.
21. Hobb, *Assassin's Apprentice*, 324; Hobb, *Fool's Errand*, 61; Hobb, *Fool's Fate*, 144–145.
22. Hobb, *Golden Fool*, 327, 392.
23. Furlow, "Angoon Remembers," 146–148.
24. Ibid., 150.
25. Olson, *The Tlingit*, 41.
26. Ibid., 44.
27. Hobb, "5000 Words about Myself."
28. Olson, *The Tlingit*, 5.
29. Ibid., 2–3.

30. Miller, "Alaskan Tlingit and Tsimshian."
31. Buerge, "Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest: An Introduction."
32. Hobb, *Fool's Errand*, 223; Hobb, *Golden Fool*, 246.
33. Hobb, *Golden Fool*, 285–286, 424–425.
34. Ibid., 264.
35. Hobb, *Fool's Fate*, 177.
36. Olson, *The Tlingit*, 6–9.
37. Miller, "Salmon, the Lifegiving Gift."
38. Donald, "The Northwest Coast as a Study Area," 293.
39. Renker, "The Makah Tribe."
40. Hobb, *Fool's Fate*, 124–125.
41. Ibid., 128, 160, 171.
42. Miller, "Alaskan Tlingit and Tsimshian"; Furlow, "Angoon Remembers," 146–147.
43. Olson, *The Tlingit*, 58–59.
44. Miller, "Alaskan Tlingit and Tsimshian."
45. Olson, *The Tlingit*, 34–35, 46.
46. Furlow, "Angoon Remembers," 146.
47. Olson, *The Tlingit*, 46–47.
48. Miller, "Alaskan Tlingit and Tsimshian."
49. Renker, "The Makah Tribe."
50. Frey, "Coeur d'Alene (*Schitsu'umsh*)."
51. Hobb, *Fool's Fate*, 131–32.
52. Ibid., 169.
53. Ibid., 162.
54. Ibid., 180.
55. Olson, *The Tlingit*, 24; Thrush, "The Lushootseed Peoples of Puget Sound County"; Miller, "Alaskan Tlingit and Tsimshian."
56. Renker, "The Makah Tribe"; Walker and Jones, "The Nez Perce."
57. Hobb, *Fool's Fate*, 157.
58. Ibid., 163.
59. Higgins, "Approaching 'Se Unculthaholm'"; Smith, "Tolkien Grammaticus"; Padja, "Creative Corrections"; and Johnson, "*Hrolfr Kraki* in Tolkien's Middle-Earth."
60. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth* (2003); Wainwright, *Tolkien's Mythology for England*, 12–14; Lee and Solopova, *The Keys of Middle-Earth*; Flieger, *Green Suns and Faërie*, 130–131; Atherton, *There and Back Again*, 21–23.
61. Gough, "Tolkien's Creation Myth in *The Silmarillion*," 1–2.

62. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, 7–14.
63. Robinson, "Childhood Readings and the Genesis of Names," 104–106.
64. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (2002), 125–129.
65. Drout, "Reading the Signs of Light: Anglo Saxonism," 231.
66. Fine, *Shared Fantasy*, 13–15; Mackay, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game*, 14–15; Schick, *Heroic Worlds*, 18–20.
67. Campbell, "A Clash of Medieval Cultures," 326.
68. Davis and Altschul, introduction to *Medievalism in the Postcolonial World*, 16–17.
69. Ibid., 1–3, 9.
70. Ibid., 7–9, 21.
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