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hemma, men också om att synliggöra relevanta trådar bakåt. Holmqvist skriver alltså in sin undersökning i litteraturvetenskap och transstudier, ställer transläsningen i relation till queerstudier och arbetar intersektionellt. Men hur är det med andra linjer, till exempelvis feministisk litteraturkritik och *Gay and Lesbian Studies*? Det förblir en smula oklart hur Holmqvist placerar sin egen forskning vetenskapshistoriskt i relation till tidigare identitetspolitiska och identitetshistoriska projekt.

Trots att Sam Holmqvists avhandling ingalunda är invändningsfri förtjänar den verkligen epitetet pionjärarbete. Det här är en studie som öppnar ett nytt perspektiv i svensk litteraturhistorisk forskning; som synliggör en tidigare undanskymd tradition och insisterar inte bara på litteraturens samhällspolitiska roll, utan även på dess avgörande betydelse i enskilda människors liv. Ur det tidigare osedda skriver Holmqvist fram en berättelse om transgörande som också visar sig rymma identitetsskapande och emancipatoriska möjligheter. Därigenom lyckas hen säga någonting väsentligt nytt även om ett så väl genomforskat verk som *Drottningens juvelsmycke*.

I växelverkan mellan skönlitteratur, vetenskap och självbiografiska berättelser synliggör Holmqvist också nya kretslopp och påverkansvägar, dialoger mellan genrer och konstarter. Dessutom påbörjar hen en de marginaliserades *läsar*historia, som i många fall handlar om att finna möjligheter till spegling och identifikation, varhelst sådan står till buds.

Holmqvist skriver vidare inom en emancipatorisk tradition men går emot den gren som hävdar att bara det förebildliga och subversiva är värt uppmärksamhet. Även i texter präglade av en konservativ samhällssyn finns sprickor och identifikationsmöjligheter. Genom ett brett transbegrepp och skönlitterära texter som spänner över genregränser och mellan radikalt och reaktionärt undviker Holmqvist både idealisering och stigmatisering, samtidigt som maktperspektivet är ständigt närvarande.

Holmqvists avhandling problematiserar hur litteraturvetare vanligen närmar sig skönlitterära texter, med misstänksamhet, och hur litteraturhistoria brukar skrivas, som hjälteberättelser. Med ett stort mått av pragmatism navigerar hen i en rik flora av tidigare forskning och stundtals svårförenliga teoretiska perspektiv, med inställningen att utgångspunkterna och frågorna är det som styr. Även om

valet av anakronismen som historiografisk utgångspunkt hade kunnat problematiseras ytterligare erbjuder förhållningssättet unika möjligheter att tala om historiska företeelser på ett språk som nutiden förstår och att sätta ord på praktiker som funnits men ännu inte benämnts. Holmqvists "historienära anakronism" har potential att fungera fortsatt produktiv just för den normkritiska forskning som både vill undersöka gårdagen och påverka morgondagen.

Transformationer rymmer två stora avslöjanden; för det första att det fortfarande finns så mycket ogjort kring 1800-talslitteraturen, och för det andra att litteraturen på avgörande sätt kan bidra till att stärka levande, verkliga personer i deras identitetsskapande och frigörelse. Avhandlingen utgör därmed ytterligare ett tungt vägande bevis för att relationen mellan litteratur, liv och samhälle ständigt behöver undersökas på nytt och att litteraturhistorisk forskning, för att förbli relevant, måste laddas med de nya frågor och perspektiv som tillvarons föränderlighet väcker.

Åsa Arping

Per Israelson. *Ecologies of the Imagination: Theorizing the Participatory Aesthetics of the Fantastic*. Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University. Stockholm 2017.

Ecologies of the Imagination, as Per Israelson tells us in the introduction, argues that "an ecological function of media, genres and texts is necessary to the world building of the fantastic. As the fantastic focuses on the creation of other worlds, it is an aesthetics of coming into being, of *ontogenesis*" (11). This word *ontogenesis* is a key word in the dissertation, indicating the author's focus on becoming rather than being, which follows a tradition that can be traced through avant-garde art, postmodernism, deconstruction, and finally posthumanism. Posthumanism, in fact, is the guiding philosophy of this dissertation, which might ultimately be described as a posthumanist approach to understanding the genre of fantasy. Conversely, the author seems to suggest that fantasy has as much to teach us about posthumanism as posthumanism teaches us about fantasy. I will note here that the author is careful to distinguish posthumanism from transhumanism, noting that transhumanism is ultimately a humanist and anthropocentric enterprise,

while posthumanism is a philosophy that seeks to unseat humanism from its position of privilege.

Beginning with the introduction, much of this work is guided by Tzvetan Todorov's influential book, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973). What Israelson finds most useful in Todorov's work is the description of fantasy as "a hesitation," a hermeneutic uncertainty that occurs in the face of the unexplainable. This hesitation is evident when faced with Don Francisco Goya's strange collection of etchings called *Los* Caprichos, which inhabit a liminal world between sleep and waking, image and text. *Los Caprichos* provokes and embodies hermeneutic hesitation. As this example demonstrates, the dissertation aims to extend Todorov's conception of "hesitation" beyond nineteenth-century literature, and indeed beyond the confines of the fantasy story itself. It also aims to expand Iser's reader-response theory – which is central to Todorov's approach – well beyond the reader. In Israelson's terms, "Todorov's definition can then explain how texts, as well as media and genres, also always involve material participation" (12). It is this move from the body of the text to the body of the reader, and then a leap to other bodies in the environment – or as Bruno Latour would call them, agential actors – that characterizes Israelson's theory of media ecology.

Another way of describing this network of participation is by means of cybernetic or neo-cybernetic theorization. Hence, creeping secretly beneath this dissertation are the relentless, non-hierarchical rhizomes of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who also offer their concept of assemblage to this project, which helps define the scene of reading as a network and environment rather than as a closed, liberal-humanist system. As Israelson notes, this idea owes some debt to Gilbert Simondon's notion of technical individuation. And from here we can trace a long genealogy: Elizabeth Grosz refers to this complex milieu of interacting bodies as the site of "environmental ontogenesis." Jane Bennett prefers the similar concept of "distributed agency." Katherine Hayles, in a related vein, establishes a model of subjectivity as "environmental feedback" (15). Finally, Donna Haraway has given us the word "sympoesis," borrowed from biological science, to describe a complex "becoming-with" that has broad ethical implications. I will return to this point in my conclusion.

These theories all come together in Israelson's "media-ecological definition of the fantastic." His argument is that the fantastic is a special genre, if it is indeed a genre at all. Why is it special? Not only does the fantastic, like all fiction in general, provide a site for investigating the idea of "distributed agency," but the genre of fantasy itself "explicitly highlights and ... operationalizes the ontogenesis of media, genres and texts" (14). This is the key argument of the dissertation, which is borne out in four chapters that investigate an eclectic mix of media objects.

The first chapter takes on the comic book series *The Unwritten*, by Mike Carey and Peter Gross, published between 2009 and 2015. *The Unwritten* serves as a test case of sorts, to demonstrate how media can act as an ecosystem, how genre can be conceived as part of an ecological framework, and how text can be conceived as a participatory ecosystem. In all of this, the whale – yes, the whale – looms large.

To make the argument about media functioning as an ecosystem, Israelson delves deeper into the cybernetic and neo-cybernetic theories mentioned already. Here, the *The Unwritten* comic book series in both form and content serves as a conspicuous example of how this ecosystem manifests itself. The ecosystem in question is not just an interplay of form and content, but a distributed, participatory emergence of text and body. This is where Mark Hansen's concept of System-Environment-Hybrids, or SEH, comes into play. SEH reworks cybernetic theory to suggest an ecology in which closed systems interact within open environments through a creative process of ontogenesis.

This ecology is illustrated, suggests Israelson, in the characters of Tommy Taylor, Pullman, and perhaps most importantly, the Leviathan from *The Unwritten* comic series. Israelson narrates the situation as follows, "Pullman claims to be immortal, and states that his sole purpose in life now is to die. But in order to do so, the Leviathan feeds on his story – as it feeds on Tommy Taylor's story – and therefore makes sure to cultivate and reproduce it, thus keeping Pullman, and now Tommy Taylor, alive as fodder" (47). Hence, the rhetorical figure of metalepsis, as elaborated by Gérard Genette, is introduced in the dissertation as an example of structural coupling, a concept familiar to neo-cyberneticists.

Key to understanding the concept of structural coupling in the context of media systems are the notions of affect and sensory perception. Drawing on Brian Massumi, Israelson notes that "sensation is always a process, temporal and spatial, in which

different senses participate" (54). The comic book then entails a distribution of the sensual, a synaesthetic experience of vision, touch, and movement. To repeat Israelson's argument in his own terms, "While all media function as system-environment hybrids, accordingly making an environmental heterogeneity an integral part of its operation and engaging a distribution of the senses, it is nevertheless the case that the aesthetics of the fantastic operationalizes this heterogeneity" (55). In particular, the world of Tommy Taylor presents us with a sensual environment that is "organizationally ajar," not just a product of human subjectivity, but a process of worlding that in Jane Bennett's configuration, involves "words on the page, words in the reader's imaginations, sounds of words, sounds and smells in the reading room, and so on, and so on – all these bodies co-acting are what do the job" (59). This is the vibrant text-body at work.

Israelson is careful to distinguish this text-body from the reader response theory of Wolfgang Iser, the co-created text of Umberto Eco, and the writerly text of Roland Barthes. For each of these theorists there is still a closed system of reader and text, and there is still a hierarchy in which human subjectivity reigns supreme. In the media ecosystem, there is no hierarchy. We are dealing instead with a flat ontology.

From here, Israelson makes the suggestion that genre itself acts as an ecosystem. In his words, "genres organize their environment, and in this sense function as a theoretical deduction, while at the same time being organized by the environments to which they are coupled." This chapter explores the work of several genre theories before landing on the work of Lucy Armitt's postmodernist conception of the fantastic as a "transgressive mode, crossing borders and challenging boundaries" (87). Still, Israelson suggests that Armitt's radically embodied and distributed conception of fantasy is not radical enough, and that he is searching for an approach in which "the postmodernist critique of the critical categories of enlightened humanism is taken to its conclusion" (88).

The more radical approach might be described as a theory of emergent textual bodies. This approach is played out in Israelson's discussion of *The Unwritten*, which, as a fantastic body, operationalizes the concept of "configurative textuality." After demonstrating how *The Unwritten* embodies the concepts of cybertext, ergodic literature, unit operations, and hypericon, chapter one ultimately

leaves us with the thought that *The Unwritten* folds us into a world with "two types of narrative and two versions of subjectivity." One is archival, or *archontic*, and it is authoritarian and hierarchical. The other is anarchic and participatory, embodying the notion of sympoeisis. Israelson presents this is a battle between the archontic and the ecological. While we would like to cheer for the ecological to smash the archontic, the author makes it clear this is not a Manichean binary. Even the operationally ajar closure of an ecosystem "involves a selection, and in this sense organization always means a limitation and a reduction of heterogeneity" (110). This is the problem of "open closure." So in the end of *The Unwritten*, the whale devours narrative whole, and provides closure. But of course, the closure is not absolute, and *The Unwritten* concludes with a remainder, as Wilson Taylor descends once again into the underworld. Ultimately, I could have reduced my entire summary of this chapter to a simple aphorism: *The Unwritten is a* "Moby-us strip."

Chapter two takes us from the sea of the Leviathan to the Middle-Earth of hobbits. Here, the author, having firmly established his concept of media ecology, applies it toward a reading of J.R.R. Tolkien's work, life, and after-life. Put simply, this chapter places Tolkien within a quantum universe of vibrant matter in which discrete objects – including hobbits, wizards, and elves – express their agency in a media ecological environment that also includes books, movies, games, toys, and illustrations. Ultimately, the author depicts Tolkien's protean oeuvre as an epic battle between archontic and ecological impulses.

This chapter looks at the production history of Tolkien's fantastic work, from his rise in popularity that came with the introduction of the paperback, to the role-playing games that struggled with the archival impulse of copyright protection. But most of this chapter is concerned with phenomenological and ontological aspects of Middle Earth as they relate to the genre of fantasy. Tolkien's concept of "Secondary Belief" plays a central role in this chapter. Not to be confused with the willing suspension of disbelief, Secondary Belief, as put forth by Tolkien himself, seems to describe a heightened state of participation and immersion, which Tolkien associates with Magic. The dissertation then sets out, carefully, to test if Secondary Belief might fit the model of participatory action that characterizes ontogenesis and sympoeisis.

As Israelson argues, the radical variability of Tolkien's texts, the versions and adaptations, which are coupled in systems of emergence with an active readership might serve to "criticize a modernist, liberal humanist notion of literature" (135). Tolkien's method of myth-making calls to mind the activity of play brought on by "hermeneutic ambiguity in the text" (137). Not only are Tolkien's main texts riddled with unanswered secrets and shapeshifting monsters twined in a feedback loop with the readership, but his mythology has generated an entire ecosystem of characters, things, and worlds far beyond Tolkien's imagination. The discussion comes to a head in Tolkien's posthumously published book, *The Children of Hurin*, the last edition of which was overseen by his son Christopher. In Israelson's words, "Every new version of the text – whether in manuscript or printed form – establishes itself as *the* archontic version, as the ultimate implementation of the official archive, while retaining, by virtue of the configurative textuality of the archontic, the impetus for new sympoeitic configurations" (145). What the author does not consider are the paternalistic implications of these configurations.

The final section of chapter two moves from the ecosystem of fan fiction, RPGs and parodies to the parliament of things, including swords, rings, mirrors, and of course, secret books. It is through the agency of such things, Israelson tells us, that "narrative becomes world" (166). He returns to the vibrant matter of Jane Bennett, supplementing it with Timothy Morton's ethical notion of "ecological thought," and perhaps most importantly, Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of asymmetrical responsibility. Through Levinas, Middle Earth becomes a primer in the "non-reducible strangeness of the other" (186), whether that other is an Orc, a sword, a ring, or the 1969 paperback copy of the parody, *Bored of the Rings*. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how radical otherness can provoke horror. The discussion is mediated primarily through the enigmatic figure of Tom Bombadil, mysterious forest-dweller excommunicated from the Peter Jackson movies because, perhaps, he is simply too un-representable. Too other. Tom is, after all, "a thing that merely is."

Chapter three reveals that Middle Earth is part of a comic book sandwich in the dissertation, of which the second piece of bread is *Miracleman*. Israelson uses this chapter as a medium for exploring the superhero as posthumanist configuration par excellence. Not only do superheroes summon the transhumanist connotations of the word posthuman, but they also serve to unseat the seeming autonomy and stability of the liberal humanist subject, a goal central to posthumanist philosophy. *Miracleman*, the character, the comic book series, and more, was chosen primarily because of its conspicuous genesis, its storied past, its shifting identity, and as Israelson puts it, its effectiveness as a "site and vehicle for investigating the function of cultural memory" (203). *Miracleman*, notes Israelson, "probes the ethical and political function of narration, calling attention, by the elaborate folding of different layers of narration, to the intricate relation of storytelling and history, fiction and world building" (205).

This chapter pays specific attention to the design of comic narrative itself, its panels, frames, pages, word balloons, and so on, which come to form what Israelson calls a "configurative textuality." It is clear, however, that the configuration is fluid. Here, the concepts of *arthrology* and *braiding* are mobilized. Arthrology, which can be restrained or general, refers to both the sequenced layout of pages and the emergence of the comic book as a network. This latter meaning of arthrology, elaborated by Thierry Groensteen is enacted in an operation called "braiding" (215). The concept of "braiding" puts comics in the world of machinic assemblages, as things participating in a translinear ecology of readers, comics, and other things. In chapter three this ecology is punctuated by a play of identity between Miracleman, Captain Marvel, and Marvelman.

The chapter moves from a consideration of the genealogy of *Miraclemen* to a discussion of both the form and content of individual issues, pages, and panes of the comic, including a number of close readings. Responding to a two-page spread from *Miracleman* #14, in which Huey Moon's dancing body merges with the white background of a complex page, Israelson provides the following description: "Instead of offering an interpretation of the represented dance, the many different unities of representation involved in the page make clear how meaning emerges as a momentary distribution of positions, trajectories and movements. Rather than reading the dance, reading becomes the dance" (248). This is a good example of how comics, in Israelson's terms, don't just mean, they also *do* something to their readers (267). To view comics otherwise is to banish them to the world of

"capital L" Literature, with its authorial or *archontic* view of subjectivity.

Chapter four focuses on William Blake's work as an emergent media ecosystem that includes birds and tygers, copper plates and acid, schizophrenic demi-gods, and Rockefeller Center in New York City. In fact, the chapter begins and ends at Rockefeller Center, with a meditation on Lee Lawrie's Blake-inspired sculpture over the main entrance of the building. Immediately, this intrusion of public art into the dissertation demonstrates the capaciousness of this Israelson' conception of "media systems." Drawing heavily on the work of Roger Whitson and Jason Whittaker (perhaps too heavily), the dissertation adopts the term Zoamorphosis to describe the participatory ontogenesis of Blake's work, which can be traced across a network of contemporary cultural objects, from fan art and comics to monumental sculpture.

This chapter provides a brief overview of Blake's method of illuminated printing, which W.J.T. Mitchell famously described as a composite art form that challenges modernist aesthetics. The radical variability that characterizes Blakean aesthetics embodies both Blake's cosmological conception of "contraries" and also the conception of the fantastic as "hermeneutical ambiguity" (282). Israelson investigates two of Blake's most ardent critics, Harold Bloom and Northrop Frye, both of whom attempt to define Blake's mythology as a "structure of coherent meaning" (283). As Israelson notes, such attempts at systematizing Blake are doomed to failure, in part because of Blake's radical aesthetics and cosmology, but also because both Bloom and Frye worked from an almost purely textual conception of Blake's work, ignoring the complexity of his printing methods, which produced a vortex of images and texts. It is only by acknowledging the complex materiality of Blake's work – in what Jerome McGann has called "media-specific analysis" – that one can ascertain their participatory aesthetics and approach Blake within a sympoeitic media ecology. That said, the dissertation smartly considers what it means to study Blake's work in digital form, thanks to the tremendous resources of the Blake Archive.

To demonstrate the extent of Blake's media ecology, Israelson examines the comic book series *The Invisibles*, written by Grant Morrison. *The Invisibles* seems Blakean for a number of reasons, in part because it, like Blake's cosmology, challenges Western metaphysics and conventional notions of linear temporality. Central to this discussion is the interplay between autonomous subjectivity and ecologically distributed subjectivity. These two models of subjectivity are not meant to be mutually exclusive in *The Invisibles*, but form a dynamic structural coupling. To make his argument, Israelson examines both the abstract cosmology of *The Invisbles* as well as specific frames of the comic, which are given close readings. A salient part of this close reading is a discussion of the mythical, orb-like figure Barbelith, a figure that Israelson traces back to the globe of blood in Blake's *Urizen*, to the vortex in Blake's composite design schema, and ultimately to the period at the end of the last sentence in the final issue of *The Invisibles*.

The chapter on Blake also includes a discussion of Blake's sublime aesthetics in his illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and a lengthy examination of Philip Pullman's fantasy trilogy for children, *His Dark Materials*, published between 1995 and 2000. The particular focus of this latter text is on the mysterious figure of Dust, which plays a complex agential role in Pullman's book series and related media, ultimately serving as a reminder that interpretation also entails participation. Eventually, this chapter comes to rest on a Lego block version of the Rockefeller Center Urizen, calling into question the role of commodification and consumption in the entire dissertation, topics that warrant further investigation.

With this in mind, I will note that there is an underlying biopolitics that the author does not address adequately in this study of mostly male artists and audiences. This becomes painfully evident in Israelson's discussion of Haraway's re-appropriation of the word *Cthulhu* from H.P. Lovecraft, whom she accuses of misogyny and racism. As the author criticizes Haraway for respelling the word as *Chthulu* (thus reclaiming it by moving the letter 'h'), he misses an opportunity to develop a politics for his ecology of the imagination, perhaps even an ecological ethics. This missing piece would certainly benefit the project's evolution from dissertation to book, a development that I heartily encourage.

Marcel O'Gorman