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***Queering Faith in Fantasy Literature: Fantastic Incarnations and the Deconstruction of Theology* by Taylor Driggers**

Abstract

Review of Taylor Drigger's *Queering Faith in Fantasy Literature: Fantastic Incarnations and the Deconstruction of Theology*, the first publication in Bloomsbury Academic's new 'Perspectives in Fantasy' series

Additional Keywords

Carter, Angela

1420 were “fair to see and strong, and most of them had a rich golden hair that had before been very rare among hobbits” (*LotR* VI.9.1023), which Stuart notes is “a sign of [blonde] Galadriel-gifted blessedness” (101). Such examples are plentiful and easy to find throughout Tolkien’s writings, and it is hardly a stretch to imagine that white supremacists might see themselves at home in the Shire.

Tolkien, Race, and Racism in Middle-earth is still an extremely valuable contribution to Tolkien Studies, and it represents perhaps the most thorough treatment thus far of these matters. The desire to absolve Tolkien and his fandom is understandable, but it is important to recognize and to emphasize the truth lest the threats posed by white supremacists and like-minded readers be too easily dismissed or underestimated. In the attempt to save Tolkien and his work from those who would exploit it for their racist purposes, wishful thinking is harmful, and it would be far better to acknowledge and to analyze the racism to be found in these and other writings. Stuart’s book provides important research for such acknowledgement and analysis, and is therefore a worthy addition to the Tolkien scholar’s library.

—Robert T. Tally, Jr.

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QUEERING FAITH IN FANTASY LITERATURE: FANTASTIC INCARNATIONS AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THEOLOGY. Taylor Driggers. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 248 pp. ISBN 9781350231733. \$115.

AS THE FIRST BOOK IN BLOOMSBURY’S MUCH LAUDED “Perspectives on Fantasy” series, Taylor Driggers’s *Queering Faith in Fantasy Literature* offers a fascinating methodology in utilising the literature under consideration as a tool to push the boundaries of critical theory. The result is a densely packed theoretical investigation. Through fantasy fiction, Driggers argues, readers and critics are able to deconstruct Christianity as a heteronormative structure which is thought to exclude women and LGBTQIA+ people. While Driggers’s case studies approach focuses less on the books or genre under discussion and more

as a vehicle to extend theoretical discussions, the monograph extends meaningful discussions of both literary theory and queer theory. For instance, in chapter 1, "Saving face? Fantasy, ethical alterity and deconstruction," Driggers spends a significant amount of time considering Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophy, focusing specifically on the application of the theory to theological readings, before then "calling to adventure" (34) the fantasy scholar to deconstruct fantastical texts using a similar methodology. He then takes on this call himself by deconstructing Christianity in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), C.S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces* (1956), and Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). Deconstruction via Derrida continues to be an important thread throughout the monograph as Driggers then considers the "shared vocabulary" (6) of deconstructive feminism and fantasy fiction, examining Hélène Cixous (chapter 2, "Dragons in the neighbourhood: The fantastic discourse of femininity") and Luce Irigaray (chapter 3, "Hetero-doxies: Fantasy and the problem of divine womanhood"), before turning to queer theorists such as Marcella Althaus-Reid, Linn Marie Tonstand, Judith Butler, and Jack Halberstam (chapter 4, "Drag(on) theology: The queer strangers of fantasy"). In each, Driggers applies the same structure as that of chapter 1, first presenting each philosophy and philosopher and paying particular attention to their religious background and their consequential application of philosophy to religion and theology, before then extending the discussion to fantastical literature, working through the three case studies as demonstrative examples. Aside from the introduction and chapter 1, which work together to establish the methodology employed throughout the book, of the later chapters I found chapter 4 "Drag(on) theology" to be the most impactful. This is partly because I appreciate a good pun (who doesn't?) and partly because Driggers brings in other texts outside of the three case studies to further establish his arguments, although he still limits most of this investigation to one of the selected key authors (in this case, Le Guin and her *Earthsea* territories).

Driggers's choice of texts is interesting. A repeated look at the same three texts is effective in this case, as it prioritises the theoretical discourse over any particular text as well as allowing a more nuanced discussion than a survey approach would entail. However, Driggers himself points out that "all three case study novels [he has] chosen throw genre into question" (19). It is perhaps counterproductive for a book that professes to focus on fantasy fiction to deliberately chose texts that are genre-fluid. But for Driggers, theology seems to be inextricable from fantasy, and he selects genre-fluid texts in order to suggest that these genre-defying texts should be read as fantastical *because* of this theological underpinning. However, as Driggers avoids outlining and defining theology, this conceptualisation becomes problematic.

Queering Faith in Fantasy Literature begins with an opening statement which situates Christian readings of fantasy at the forefront: "Fantasy literature has long been celebrated within Christian communities for its ability to give narrative form to theology at a remove from the usual trappings of religion" (1). This statement is certainly correct, but unexpected. As a non-Christian reader, I operated under the mistaken assumption that *Queering Faith* referred to a wider remit of faith. While Driggers argues that what "sets the argument of this book apart from others is its specifically religious focus, which highlights fantasy's ability to subvert (and even to pervert) primary-world religions" (20), the blanket statement fails to acknowledge the Christian lens through which Driggers is approaching his investigation, or that, rather than a world-view, the Christian-focus not only centres the work on Anglophone Western fantasy, but a particular *type* of Western fantasy (and perhaps even a certain type of Christianity). To be fair to Driggers, his stance *does* speak to existing scholarship, which he highlights in the introduction. However, while these critical selections allow Driggers to set up his own research in conversation with his predecessors, it leaves the reader with the overall impression that *all* fantasy criticism is rooted in Christianity, a gap that could have been resolved with a simple statement acknowledging the lacuna. Moreover, while Driggers identifies how "The tone of theological fantasy criticism was set in the 1980s by Colin M. Manlove" (10), one would expect to see more recent scholarship on reading hegemonic structures in fantasy, such as Helen Young's *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* (2016) or Maria Sachiko Ceceire's *Re-Enchanted* (2019); both highly acclaimed works which engage with the colonial nature of Christian fantasy are missing entirely from the bibliography. While Driggers's work focuses on sexuality rather than on colonial discourse, one cannot fully engage in Christian discourses without also acknowledging its colonial intersections. Driggers's use of the "Christian reader" also has the unfortunate ironic effect of alienating non-Christian readers like myself.

That said, I would like to emphasise that this gap is not irredeemable and could have been easily fixed with a small revision in framing, perhaps by placing the Christian-focus within the title itself: *Queering Christian Faith in Fantasy Literature* would have been more appropriate. But the oversight within the title has perhaps less to do with Driggers's own presentation and perhaps more to do with the series editors of the Bloomsbury "Perspectives on Fantasy" series attempting to reach a wide (non-Christian) audience for their first production. While I am appreciative of their enthusiasm, with three series editors and seven more academic board members on Bloomsbury's "Perspectives on Fantasy" series, I would have expected a bit more conscientiousness with the assumption that 'faith' and 'theology' translates to a Judeo-Christian faith. Despite these framing issues, I am still wholly convinced

by the methodology and arguments of the book. Driggers's *Queering Faith in Fantasy Literature* offers an incredibly nuanced and impactful addition to the field of fantasy criticism. As a first monograph, Driggers's approach to ways in which we can consider fantasy literature, as a methodological tool to push the boundaries of queer theory and to deconstruct theology, is an impressive undertaking. I look forward in seeing the ways in which future scholars of fantasy literature take up Driggers's "call for adventure" in implementing both his arguments and methodology to the critical field.

—C. Palmer-Patel



FRIENDSHIP IN THE LORD OF THE RINGS. Cristina Casagrande. Translated by Eduardo Boheme. Edinburgh, Luna Press Publishing, 2022. 199 + xvi p. ISBN 9781913387938. £16.99.

RECENTLY TRANSLATED FROM PORTUGUESE, the English edition of Cristina Casagrande's *Friendship in The Lord of the Rings* marks not only a meaningful contribution to Tolkien scholarship, but also evidences the excellent direction of Tolkien studies beyond the Anglo-American world. Casagrande employs many of the common secondary sources in Tolkien scholarship (viz. Aquinas, Aristotle, Propp, etc.) and brings to these readings a renewed vitality while also gathering them into fruitful conversation with voices of Brazilian Tolkienists. What Casagrande advances in her detailed study of *The Lord of the Rings* (in both the original and the film adaptations) is that friendship, as far as Tolkien is concerned, "is the necessary condition for the plot to unfold" (1).

Casagrande begins her first chapter with a brief outline of her project. Here, she surveys Tolkien's life and the publication story of *The Lord of the Rings*, sketches the methodological lens she will later utilize (Thomistic and Aristotelean), and suggests the ways in which a comparative reading of the books alongside their film adaptations deepens such a study. "The intention [...]" Casagrande informs us, "is to deepen the knowledge about the theme—friendship—verifying how the same work is articulated across media" (10). By employing a Thomistic-Aristotelean reading of *The Lord of the Rings* in these two different forms, Casagrande suggests a unity of meaning between Tolkien's concept of the *eucatastrophe* and the teleological *eudaemonia* spoken of in both Aquinas and Aristotle.

The second chapter resumes and expands on the role friendship played in Tolkien's own life, suggesting a link between the sub-creative powers of friendship which engender fantasy writing (Tolkien wrote with and among