Critique of Fantasy, Vol. 1

laurencerickels

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Introduction; or, How Star Wars Became Our Oldest Cultural Memory

I have touched down in the Star Wars franchise on several occasions to illustrate a historical paradox I once dared name “Nazi Psychoanalysis.”¹ Let me say right off that this study will not look more closely at the Star Wars movies.² Instead, it will explore a terrain between the science fiction and fantasy genres that the success of George Lucas’s 1977 film illuminated and which remains to this day the cradle of blockbuster culture.

Orbiting around the B-line I will continue to make in this introduction, examples abound of what might be termed the “Star Wars Effect.” Roland Emmerich, who was originally enrolled in film school in Germany to become a producer, switched his career goal to directing when he saw Star Wars. Did it take a German to recognize Lucas’s refurbishing of Allied propaganda films? The Death Star, the unbeatable foe, is brought down by a makeshift alliance of unlikely victors, who win as losers, not as winners. That’s Lucas’s remix of the formula: to win as winner would be tantamount to filling the position the

¹ See Laurence A. Rickels, Nazi Psychoanalysis, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
² My most sustained attempt to interpret the six Star Wars films can be found in I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 71–74.
Nazis forever occupy in the global culture industry. If losers continue to prevail against empires of evil as the good and the brave, then the Nazis keep on winning as unrepentant winners. The 2020 pandemic incited US news anchors to cite from the famous broadcasts Churchill delivered during the Battle of Britain and encourage a population endangered by and as losers to rally around the prospect that they were now living Star Wars. Star Wars turned propaganda hype into archetype. Emmerich’s blockbuster Independence Day (1996) testified to the instruction he took down from Star Wars.

The success of Lucas’s movie encouraged the Bond franchise to hitch to its star the one Ian Fleming fiction that was exceptionally and untenably close to World War Two: Moonraker (1955). At the end of the movie The Spy Who Loved Me (1977), the next Bond film to be coming soon was already announced to be For Your Eyes Only (1981), the first film to turn to the short stories for material and title. But Star Wars placed Moonraker back on the books-to-film shelf. The producers recognized a way around the novel’s direct hit of Nazi vengeance. In the 1979 movie, Sir Hugo Drax operates out of California from within a network of facilities for research and construction of space shuttle-like transportation next door to the French chateau he transferred to the American West stone by stone, like London Bridge.

In the novel, Sir Hugo Drax is a celebrity in the UK by dint of great wealth and incredible generosity. Drax has donated to his adopted home the ultimate defense rocket, “the Moonraker,” which will restore British sovereignty in the Cold War context. That Drax all along planned to blast London with the lifetime-long held-back miracle weapon is a reprisal made all the more blatant by the blind spot it occupies. For, Drax’s rocket scheme is such a foreign body – both as event in the book and, apparently, as book – that no one in Britain can recognize a Nazi victory rocket when only ten years after the war they see a big one being built atop the cliffs of Dover.

In the movie, the Nazi/“not see” Death-Star element is the eugenics prejudice guiding the selection of sole survivors to be transported in the flotilla of space shuttles to the restart position, the pure future of the species. But even the best laid plan is undone by Bond’s Allied propaganda pitch to Drax’s henchman,
the giant named Jaws, who, suited up with his midget partner, thought he was going to get away with the purity brigade. The freakish victim takes his stand with Bond’s triumph against all odds.

Does Lucas’s admission or recollection of the influence of Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* contradict the setting of the *Star Wars* success story in these historical prop departments? No. Although Campbell first published the book in 1949, it was upon its revised reissue in 1968 that he, like his model Carl Jung, found a larger following in the United States. Campbell benefited, therefore, from the era of change tied to the antiwar movement in the States. After the spirit of rebellion had gone into decline, Lucas brought it back, albeit reshuffled along the inner/outer fronts of World War Two propaganda. The stampede of family approval followed. Shortly after the appearance of Lucas’s movie, new editions of Campbell’s book displayed Luke Skywalker (Mark Hammill) on the cover.

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* had already served as the main bookend propping up the media’s mythologizing of President Kennedy’s term in office as “Camelot.” The former First Lady, in the meantime Jacqueline Onassis and Doubleday editor, arranged for the 1988 publication of *The Power of Myth*. The sequel to and summary of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was based on a transcript of Bill Moyers’s long conversation with Campbell, which was filmed for TV on Lucas’s Skywalker Ranch. Looking back upon this delegation (Campbell died shortly before the show aired), we could be inside a science fiction by Philip K. Dick, in particular *The Simulacra* (1964), which anticipated mass psychologization of primal scenes of a ruling middlebrow beat and the consequent marketing of the reduction of myth and religion to the stages of grief – or, rather, of the hero’s progress.

Another upgrading backstory you will hear from *Star Wars* idolators – adepts of the history of their own making in the digital archive – concerns Lucas’s contact with Japanese art cinema. Since he had been unable to obtain the adaptation rights for the *Flash Gordon* franchise, in 1973 Lucas came up with a synopsis for a heroic space movie of his own, which reads like the plot line of Akira Kurosawa’s *The Hidden Fortress* (1958). However, whatever all-nighter pressure he was under to slap together that
summary, it didn’t feature the franchise’s distinctive traits, such as “the force,” which only appeared in the final version. What remains from the cribbed synopsis are the two robots, who held the place of the bickering peasants. Too much information is the milieu of online outlines of interpretation. I found an afterimage of this unlikely lineage of influence in an interview with Andrei Tarkovsky’s son. When he was a kid, he wasn’t able to see *Star Wars* in the Soviet Union, so parental guidance told him the story and enacted it so he could watch it in his imagination. The next day his father showed him the movie that was available for screening: *The Hidden Fortress.* What I take from this anecdote is that censorship, which gets passed along, promotes half-knowledge.

*Star Wars* introduces itself both in the timeless past of the fairy tale (“A long time ago”) and in the future of outer space (“in a galaxy far, far away”). This conflation of defining traits of the genres is a compromise formation in light of the hostile takeover bid informing J.R.R. Tolkien’s manifesto-essay “On Fairy-Stories.” The breakthrough success of *Star Wars* collected its momentum in the contest between the new or renewed genre of fantasy, which Tolkien began championing in the 1930s, and the other genre component of Lucas’s film, science fiction. The historical onset of the rivalry between fantasy and science fiction is crowded with literary examples. But as B-genres science fiction and fantasy were contemporaries of early cinema emerging out of the scientific and experimental study and recording of motion made visible. In an early work such as *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells, the transport through time – the ununderstood crux of this literary experiment – was rendered through description of “special effects,” the cinematic-fantastic component in the narrative, which reflected new developments and forecast the movies to come. *Critique of Fantasy* follows the rebound of wish fantasy between literary description of the ununderstood and its cinematic counterpart (for example, visual and special effects).

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Tolkien introduced his new view of a genre (as old as human consciousness, he upholds, but in the meantime confined to childhood) with a view to addressing a more adult readership. Works of fantasy tended to be reserved for children: that’s how Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937) first circulated. Tolkien concluded “On Fairy-Stories” while composing *Lord of the Rings* (1954–55), which he hoped to pitch to a more mature audience. The new young-adult genre Tolkien launched did not begin to make it outside its own subcultural niche market and become a full-grown rival of science fiction on the adjacent shelves in the bookstore until the hypnotizing success of *Star Wars*. That it is hard to tag the genre content of Lucas’s franchise fits the contest to which it owes its projection. In *Reign of Fire* (2002), fire-breathing dragons beset London in a future that sure looks like we’re back in the Battle of Britain. In the bunker’s scare – I mean, care – center, the kids are diverted by the puppet-play version of the *Star Wars* saga. The Darth Vader puppet pronounces: “I am your father,” while all around the transfixed children gawk and gasp. In this future world, the story counts as mythic fairy tale.

We could observe the *Star Wars* Effect skewering together the 2015 return of three major franchises. *Spectre* is punctuated throughout by encrypted souvenirs of the films comprising the franchise chapter that opened in 2006 styling with a return to the 1960s. The integration of Germany at the front of the line of the ghost history of World War Two (even as the world turned the denial) packed the surprise appeal of the first season of Bond movies. In 2015, the first *Spectre* agent to report at the meeting – which is a remake of a scene in *Thunderball* (1965) that reintroduces Blofeld – speaks German and business as usual. Instead of the residual charging of the traumatic history of World War Two, however, a fantasy tale is introduced along the lines of Otto Rank’s transfer of the import of the Freudian poetics of daydreaming to his own account of the myth of the birth of the hero. Young Bond, the adoptive brother, came to monopolize the father’s love like the cuckoo deposited in the nest. Blofeld remains the crazed son crying out “cuckoo, cuckoo” whenever Bond is near. His criminality, which commences with the murder of the father, expresses one sibling’s envy of the orphan brother, the true heir and hero.
We touch here on the family romance which, quickly put, is a fantasy Freud identified during his season of theorizing wish fulfillment. In *Spectre*, the authenticity of inheritance is asserted outside bloodlines, preserving the romance through its spiritual reversal: the adopted heir is the hero. The family romance is the fantasy of the child currently being raised by nice but modest foster parents (including uncles and aunts). The eventual ascendancy to hero status will disclose and reclaim the child’s more elevated inheritance.4

By keeping it all in the family romance, the other films flashing in the back of the minds of the viewer–experts watching *Spectre* rebound within the compact underworld of the last three films, to which the return of Blofeld from the first season of the franchise subjects Bond, the bond with the viewer. That the viewer-expert knows the franchise and brings to the new

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4 Rank made the family romance the rule of the heroic saga in *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden* (*The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, 1914). It is by this introject in its makeup that Campbell’s book seems to spring eternal following the splash made by Luke Skywalker. “Typically,” Campbell says to Moyers in the TV special while flashing on images from *Star Wars*, “the hero is the orphaned son of royalty. Unaware of his true identity, he is consigned to a life of drudgery and exile.” Or again: “the child of destiny has to face a long period of obscurity.” These quotes did not make it into the book *The Power of Myth*, the selective transcript of the TV special. When Campbell goes on, still on TV, to identify this situation of the hero’s childhood with Rank’s Freudian thesis of the family romance and the myth of the hero’s birth, he draws instead on the post-Freudian work Rank pursued focused on an origin of the hero in the womb, which becomes the foster placement he must jettison: “everyone is a hero in his birth. He has undergone a tremendous transformation from a little, you might say, water creature, living in a realm of amniotic fluid and so forth, then coming out, becoming an air-breathing mammal that ultimately will be self-standing and so forth, is an enormous transformation and it is a heroic act [...]. It’s the primary hero, hero form, you might say.” The scenario skips the relational origin of life between mother and child. See “Ep. 1: Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth – ‘The Hero’s Adventure’” (June 21, 1988), *Moyers Archive*, https://billmoyers.com/content/ep-1-joseph-campbell-and-the-power-of-myth-the-hero’s-adventure-audio/.
screening all the information fitting a smaller screen, the portal to the digital archive, inflects each 2015 sequel with the return to an encrypted origin.

In *Jurassic World*, the child protagonists fall into a crypt storing all that remains of the visitor center from the first film, (1993). Out of the debris they assemble a rescue vehicle. The past belongs to the history of the films, while the present allows the story’s “mythic” personalization by the viewers. Two brothers from competing eras of fantasy (the elder is a teen) shake their foster care and form an alliance to withstand on their own the derailment of the world (the separation of their true parents). The reproductive romance of the fantasy is split off into the DNA remixed in the labs to engineer the faux prehistoric animals. The secret raptor provenance is the hot spot of betrayal and allegiance in the heroic saga waged among the creatures.  

At the close of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, the young heroine, who doesn’t yet know her true parents, embarks on a journey that crosses generations to draw benefit from the first film. The dark-side double and rival is the peer of the new viewer also in terms of his expertise and fandom, which he renews in secret recess with the skull and mask of Darth Vader, the grand or great father the family romance won for him. While the inter-references in the other two sequels are each a spolia more by metonymy, the haunted helmet–skull is in fact a leftover of the original masked heavy-breathing psycho-POV retrofitted in 2015 above the entry to the super-franchise, which imparts the family romance of heroism to all franchises that carry with them the digital know-how of their viewer fans.

While the specific *Jurassic Park* franchise is less vintage than the other two that came back for more in 2015, the adaptation and book reach back through the history of the fantasy and science fiction genres to earlier novels and their subsequent adaptations, which is not lost on the fans hunting for the “Easter eggs” of cross-reference in the digital archive. The title of Michael Crichton’s sequel novel cited one of the precursors: Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Lost World* (1912). Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864) and Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *The Land that Time Forgot* (1916) are the bookends of Crichton’s posthumously published prequel, set in the late-nineteenth-century United States, *Dragon’s Teeth* (2017).
After Ridley Scott saw *Star Wars* he immediately shelved what he was planning, an adaptation of the medieval legend of “Tristan and Iseult,” and accepted instead the offer to direct *Alien* (1979). What wowed him in Lucas’s film was the new vista of special effects that the magic wand of fantasy was waving through, ultimately toward the anticipated innovations of digitization. His next film was *Blade Runner* (1982), the adaptation of P.K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), a movie that counts in its own right as history changing.6 The two films follow separate trajectories that Scott later combined in his *Alien* prequels, *Prometheus* (2012) and *Alien: Covenant* (2017), which frame his eclectic career with the mix of science fiction and fantasy, the main “effect” that *Star Wars* taught him.

Science fiction failed to predict the future, and yet fantasy did not so much succeed as draw the benefit from the resemblance of basic fantasying to the new digital relation. If the fantasy that is true is no longer the Gospel (which was Tolkien’s definition) but instead all that digitization holds in store, then fantasy becomes a genre without borders, the subsuming genre of “fiction.”

The 1977 anticipation of the digital relation went into the continuation of the original *Star Wars* trilogy like a wish into its fulfillment. Lucas was intent on imparting digital perfectibility to his earlier special effects. But embellishing the same old films was not enough: their projection into the digital era required a greater frame of heroic saga or franchise, which he accomplished by a reversal that placed the beginning in the middle. Those first *Star Wars* films were revealed to be descendants of a heroic franchise in which the fantasy of the digital relation was a wrap with the surprise of true origins.

In addition to the topics foregrounded in psy-fi, notably, psychosis and mourning (or unmourning), adolescence is pivotal throughout my archaeology of the recent past. In *Critique of Fantasy*, it’s clear right from the start that the work cut out for a poetics of daydreaming is the rescue of teen innovation from

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6 In *Germany: A Science Fiction* (Fort Wayne: Anti-Oedipus Press, 2014), I assigned *Blade Runner* to the avant-garde of the return of German science fiction after decades of repression within the recent past of the Cold War.
the turbulence of its throwaway prematurity. Freud drew the distinction between child’s play, which can be out in the open since the underlying fantasy – the wish to be big or grownup – doesn’t merit censure, and its substitute, the fantasying that takes over in adolescence and withdraws omnipotence into a stronghold that keeps private the wishes that are embarrassingly narcissistic, inartistic, and even antisocial.

The mix of B-genres to which the present study attends in tracking the ascendancy of fantasy is as nebulous as the triumphant genre’s meaning or medium, which is fantasying. That our second nature as daydreamers is so slippery does not contradict that it is, according to Freud and Tolkien, the reason for art’s existence. I have specialized before in engaging the outer limits of understanding. Psychopathy? Nobody knows. Asking people what they think daydreaming is might be a party game. Our second nature is either disowned or not known. And yet, out of the interior cacophony of “like, like” and “unfriend, unfriend,” the reflex reflex of omnipotence, I am trying to discern, as did the psychoanalysts and philosophers before me, the evolution of the social relation that is art.

You can think anything, but once you enter upon the genre of thought that is wish-fantasy, the emerging daydream scenario is at once singular (in context) and apparently limited to a finite list of variations and types. While it seems that by now anything goes in A- and B-culture and the old precept that the solo wish fantasy is inadmissible no longer applies, the ways in which primary narcissism keeps on being altered and restaged for the social relation have become “diacritical,” reliant on the biggest show in town: the public narcissism of small differences.

Freud upended the innocent/guilty impasse between fantasy altered by the stick and carrot of unattainable beauty and untenable, unsavory private daydreaming through a line of contrast that unfolds in time. In his poetics of the daydream, Freud supplied the notion of a datemark that belongs to the moment in the present that triggered the fantasying and indelibly stamped it. The constitutive arc in every daydream, which takes off from an idealized past and jump-cuts to the future of wish fulfillment so as to elide the present, is a bridge that will fall down. Fantasy is historicization waiting to happen, the mortal recoil of its flight.
The evolving genre of science fiction also lies in wait; by its salvo of right or wrong extrapolation, it is ever grounded in the present tense, in its ongoing tensions and encrypted contents. In *Origin of the German Mourning Play,* Walter Benjamin derived modern allegory from the untenability of Christianity’s purchase on the future. I am arguing, in the case of science fiction, along these lines: when a weighty forecast (that can’t wait to exercise controlling interest) falls short, allegory takes over.

Somewhere over the digital relation, Ridley Scott’s *The Martian* (2015) is a good example of a movie that looks like science fiction as often as it acts like and refers to fantasy. I give this example up front to underscore that it’s not only the evidence of medievalist props that I am following out into the borderland between the two genres. *The Martian* is the fantasy saga of the hero’s return, but the treasure he brings back to the community, the conclusion that the film adaptation adds to Andy Weir’s 2011 novel, is problem-solving, a lesson that the protagonist Mark Watson teaches in the end, which is more commensurate with digital knowledge than Christian fantasy. Earlier the hero waved the digital mirror before our eyes. Yes, he sits before some functioning console and starts logging a record of his solo time on Mars. We are his digital mirror, which Mark rolls over from recording to simultaneity-contact through a series of reenactments of a concise history of writing and telecommunication from the vantage point of the digital. Simply, but subtly, the science fiction of successful space transport falls short for the protagonists with whom we identify, who prevail against all odds by improvising outside chances out of low-tech materials, the ruins of the old story of success, namely, classical science fiction. By lagging behind, science fiction nevertheless inscribes upon the props of its failed forecasts a legible caption to the relationship to simultaneity, which in *The Martian* tells the story or history of the new millennial prospect of the one-world exploration of outer space that’s looped through the integration of China.

*Gravity* (2013) is another hybrid model that only looks like politically minded science fiction, a warning shout about space

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7 This is my translation of the German title of Benjamin’s study *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Berlin: E. Rowohlt, 1928).
ecology in the near future. The continued dependence of our media of simultaneity on the lower regions of space colonization (the satellites of the Cold War) reaps catastrophe. The allegorical apparatus between space exploration and the digital relation, the fantasy that is true, falls into place. *Gravity* gave a special-effects-enhanced sense of being in space. The director, Alfonso Cuarón, was already a veteran of fantasy’s visual and special effects through his 2004 movie *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, which spent three years in postproduction before making it to the screen. The same digital effects company was entrusted with *Gravity*.

The outer space *Gravity* explores is a fantasy space imagined in keeping with Kant’s identification of the netherworld as the main impetus for fantasying. The protagonist, with a little help from her friendly ghost, assumes the adult profile of mourning. Loving the dead, letting them go on, but also letting them go, allows the mother in space to secure a saving Chinese reentry capsule and escape the Cold War science fiction of psychoticizing loneliness and fragmentation. When she crawls out of the water onto land and stands upright, she’s back inside her embodiment.

Space is a junkyard, a chain-reaction of destruction just waiting to happen. Then the Russians detonate one of their satellites, and the debris races faster than a speeding bullet, taking out all satellites along its orbit and eclipsing digital communication on Earth. Right before the catastrophe hits, Ryan is up there fixing a satellite: too little repair too late. It cannot have been long ago that she lost her four-year-old daughter. How did she pass inspection? Her co-astronaut, Matt, is too old to have passed muster. The episode in space is a ruinscape inhabited by ghosts and their melancholic correspondents.

Before Matt pries himself loose from her resolute grasp and then comes back officially as a ghost, Ryan tells him that when she’s not at work she drives around for hours listening to any radio music at all, just no talking. (Even though she says she could get used to the silence of space, we constantly hear staticky radio transmission noise.) Ryan was out driving when she learned that her daughter had slipped at school, hit her head, and was dead. In his posthumous persona Matt is the ghost of the opening season of mourning: “Do you want to go back or stay
here? I get it – it’s nice here.” It’s nice that there’s no one to lose, which also means that there is no one to mourn her. He’s gone again but she sends a message after him, sending him off, too, after all. The message is addressed to the loss she tried to lose driving around training center USA. Her daughter is restored to an object relation in mourning. Ryan opens one of the instruction manuals that apparently can be found in every escape pod on the shelf just above the console, which, like a volume of encyclopedic knowledge from the Enlightenment with which pioneers explored the new world, takes her back for a restart no longer manically fixated upon outer space colonization.

That science fiction can go into reverse and sustain within its ruins the allegorical legibility of deregulated fantasy finds support through the commentaries on a new metaphysics of the “new world” and its genre that Gotthard Günther pursued beginning in the 1940s while in exile in the States. The German philosopher, who specialized in dismantling via Hegel Aristotelian bivalent logic, discovered in the US both American science fiction and cybernetics. His reflections on the new metaphysics of the new-world genre are a mainstay of this genealogy with B-genres. While Günther doesn’t address wish fantasying directly in his metaphysics, he does recognize in the posthumously published study Die amerikanische Apokalypse (The American Apocalypse) that the new mythic fairy tale of American science fiction is still provisional, reliant more on daydreaming contact with the remote future, which he quickly distinguishes from what is merely fantastic (“Fantasterei”).

Gotthard Günther, Die amerikanische Apokalypse, ed. Kurt Klagenfurt (Klagenfurt: Profil, 2000), 115. Only one segment was published in Günther’s lifetime: Die Entdeckung Amerikas und die Sache mit der Weltraum Literatur, the monograph that introduced his 1952 series of editions of works of American science fiction. We will be visiting the body of Günther’s introductions and commentaries from this edition together with the posthumously published The American Apocalypse throughout this study.

I drew on Günther’s work in I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick and again in Germany: A Science Fiction focusing on the articles he wrote in English for Campbell’s magazine Astounding Stories (on the sci-fi conceits of alien contact, artificial intelligence, and time jumps and
the “anticipations” that reflect “a slowly awakening speculative consciousness, which begins to set itself goals in its daydreams.” “These American daydreams of a new epoch of human history are so remarkable and so informative regarding what is as yet quite unknown about the nature of humanity in the new world that it would be a definite loss not to know more about them.”

The two genres science fiction and fantasy are imbricated in their attachment to a poetics of flights of waking fantasy. *Critique of Fantasy* reads Tolkien’s 1947 essay “On Fairy-Stories” together with its precursor, Freud’s 1907 “Der Dichter und das Phantasieren” (“The Poet and Daydreaming”). Not until Tolkien defined the genre of fantasy could it enter the offices of the “law of genre.” Fantasy is a mental faculty that Freud and Tolkien boldly claimed as the source of artistic production. Before the advent of a poetics of daydreaming, schools of philosophy had long been engaged in corralling fantasy, the wayward kin of the imagination. Freud passed the hot property of philosophical ethics along in his 1907 essay, when he addressed omnipotent wish fantasy as the resource of the aspirations and resolutions of art, which, however, the artwork can never look back at or acknowledge. By grounding his genre in the one fantasy that is true, the Gospel, Tolkien obviated and made obvious the ethical mandate of fantasy’s restraining order.

The prospect of deregulated wishing is as old as the philosophical ethics that would contain it. Within the orbit of the compulsion to find a corrective in ethics for excessive fantasying, there also emerged a philosophical reception of the realm of shadows. By deploying wish or will as cursor in evaluating occult or paranormal states, this philosophical reception directly inspired the psychoanalysis of omnipotent thought and fantasy. The onset of the philosophy of haunting coincided with an

time travel). I won’t be repeating this specific focus in *Critique of Fantasy*.


10 An earlier version of the essay was delivered as Andrew Lang Lecture in 1938.

11 This is how I will be modifying throughout this study the official English translations of the title of Freud’s brief essay.
efflorescence of clairvoyance and related states of waking dreaming in the historical setting of animal magnetism. Although the psycho-poetics of the daydream, in contrast to its philosophical prehistory, doesn’t address the ghost themes of modern Western occultism, these are the themes that prove hard to keep out and indeed, as the study shows, repeatedly overtake it.

The majority share of close reading encounters with the contestants that meet the genre requirements, as well as with the hybrids that cross the boundaries, goes into the second volume, *The Contest between B-Genres*. To organize the collateral mass of materials piled high in the borderlands, I rely on two readymades in the facing corners of the ring, C.S. Lewis’s “Space Trilogy” and the roster of American science fictions that Günther selected and glossed for the German readership in 1952. While Lewis constructs science fiction as the dark force behind every historical nihilism, Günther and his authors demolish the metaphysical mainstays of the regional civilizations that hailed from the East and banish from the New World and its genre the plain text of Old-World metaphysics, namely the fairy-story, on which the fantasy genre relies.

The third volume, *The Block of Fame*, explores the American cult of greatness in light of the early wish for it. The failure in success skews the walk into an obstacle course of writer’s block, plagiarism, and the wish to be refused (Edmund Bergler). Here I sign in with the “constellation” Adorno developed to outlast the culture industry’s depravation and theft of the poetics of fantasying. As it rises up in Adorno’s essay “Schubert” (1928), the constellation is a form of thought that throughout *Critique of Fantasy* organizes my readings in the underworld of fantasying, waking dream states, and media. All the component trajectories of the study are consequently at work in every part, and each part brings back the trajectories and ratchets up a new focus and relation among them.

*Critique of Fantasy* returns to a discarded origin of Freud’s thought. What international psychoanalysis calls desire, Freud addressed in the original language, which wishes rather than desires, with the only term available: “Wunsch,” the cognate of “wish.” The etymology extends through waystations of this study: delusion (“Wahn”), struggling to win, and, finally, the
word in the name “Venus” (the fantasy planet around which Lewis’s “Space Trilogy” orbits). The reinscription of desire within the syntax of wishing makes way for mourning.

This first volume explores the new psychonomies of mourning arising in the borderlands of the dueling B-genres. The new world enmity between the fantasy of vampirism and the science fiction of zombieism introduces a forum for addressing novel forms of grief. Their repercussions might be adduced in reading the Disney chapter of the Star Wars franchise. A new generation of antagonists and fans must breach the cryogenic stoppage of history that brings back the original forebears, even or especially those already dead off screen. But before contemplating a new mourning, the volume studies in its opening stretch all the interpretations of wish fantasy that, however mismatched, join together in supporting a poetics (and aesthetics) of the daydream. Although it is indeed an unlikely coupling given Freud’s Enlightenment-proud secular modernism, when the father of psychoanalysis opens the relay he is joined by Tolkien, the other premier daydream believer.

Tolkien was a philologist and, like his cohort C.S. Lewis, a medievalist. By both guilds he adhered to a view of continuous tradition forwarding the Middle Ages across oceans of time condensed within the history of language. Tolkien and Lewis sought a commensurate outlet for their hobbyist literary inclinations by dislodging science fiction’s monopoly among the new popular genres. Notwithstanding the rightful reclamation of certain works by Lewis, Tolkien, and Charles Williams as some kind of literature, overall the output of the academic club to which the three belonged – the Inklings! – represents the provincial drag on what was at the time the expat destiny of English-language letters. My relationship to the canon will remain cursory (with the exception of Lewis’s “Space Trilogy,” since it fully enters the borderland between science fiction and fantasy).

I will also be considering the import of German Romanticism, which helped sustain the illusion that Tolkien’s fantasy genre was the direct descendant of a continuous UK medievalist tradition. While it is not a dominant trajectory in what follows, I bring it up to sign my name in the setting of the book’s composition. During my six years teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in
Karlsruhe, I opened with a class dedicated to my renewed interest in science fiction, which became my 2014 study *Germany: A Science Fiction*. It deposited a seed of auto-stimulation in the students with an art career ahead of them. But my largest following came to the lecture hall several years later when I offered a course on the topic of fantasy. It was a happy coincidence that I was interested in taking my former dismissal of the genre to the next level of ambivalence and reflecting more deeply on its manifest ascendancy. It turned out that so many of the Karlsruhe students, especially those in training to teach art in German high school, were fantasy adherents. I remember once after screening a student film in class that I commented on a cultural difference, I thought, suggested by certain details of “low-class” life in the setting of a recognizable fairy-tale garden. The fairy-tale fantasy central to this German student film, I offered, would be replaced in its counterpart in the States by the milieu that Americans associate with trailer parks. The guest artist visiting my class, who was German, immediately commented: “The fairy-tale garden is the German trailer park.” This, then, is the bottom line and secret title of my study: Fantasy, a Trailer Park from Germany.