Tampere University

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NONHUMANITY, NATURECULTURENESS AND AGENCY IN POPULAR CULTURE

(Re)Contextualizing the Orc with the Case Study of *Bright*

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis displays the present account and use of fantastical creatures, namely orcs, as problematic because of the human-centric approaches in critical analysis concerning them. In the absence of more holistic research into fantasy species as more than fantasy tropes, recurring elements of its genre, these beings have been employed largely as objects of human analogy. In undertaking the fantastical species of texts by these correspondent uses to human concepts, the results are already predetermined. Thus, these approaches are, at least partially, inconsistent to represent the nonhuman species and creatures. The thesis moves through the common criticisms the Orc has received and provides nonhuman alternative contexts to these criticisms and common associations in order to showcase that the species is not only subservient to human action and thinking. The Orc is a natural entity on its own. This existing species naturality and recontextualizations of the Orc is illustrated through one variation of the species, the orcs of Netflix's *Bright* (2017), and its contextual relations.

The leading idea of the thesis is to provide a nonhuman perspective for the Orc and, by doing this, present the species with a context of its own being, Orcism, in light of these criticisms. In addition, the purpose is to demonstrate that the human-centrism and the pre-valued criticism have hindered the development of the Orc as a more holistic academic topic and to illustrate the harmfulness of portraying the Orc solely in human terms. Instead, the thesis proposes approaching such nonhuman species in nonhuman terms and relational contexts together with their existing connections to human related concepts, namely popular culture. In doing so, such an approach yields more holistic and descriptive results for these imaginative creatures. This can be beneficial to future research on fantasy species and even other nonhuman conceptual theories.

The key theoretical frames used to help capture the recontextualizations are nonhuman ethics, namely animal ethics and speciesism, popular cultural theory with concepts of popular culture memory and transmedia storytelling, as well as theoretical leadings to nonhuman and othered considerations mainly supported by ecoliteracy and ecofeminism. In applying these various theories as interconnected to the nonhuman species' contexts, the thesis provides discussion on the need of fantasy species research and to complement more fully the specific species representation.

Keywords: the Orc, fantasy species, nonhuman, popular culture, *Bright*, recontextualization, human-centrism

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Seuraava pro gradu -tutkielma osoittaa tämänhetkisten fantasiaolentojen, etenkin örkin, käytön ongelmallisuuden niistä tehdyissä kriittisissä analyyseissä. Koska niitä on pääasiassa lähestytty ihmiskeskeisellä maailmankatsomuksella ja käytetty yhdenmukaisesti peilaavina erinäisille ihmiskonteksteille, niiden asema akateemisena tutkimusaiheena sekä lajina itsessään on vain osittain kuvaava. Näin tehdessä tekstien fantasiaolennoista tehdyt päätelmät ovat jo valmiiksi arvotettuja ihmisten asettamilla normeilla ja siten epäjohdonmukaisia edustamaan ei-ihmisolentoja ja -lajeja, kuten örkkejä. Tutkielma analysoi yleisimpiä kritiikkejä, joita örkki on saanut, ja antaa rinnakkaisia ja ei-ihmislähtöisiä kontekseja näille kritiikeille. Tällä tavalla tutkielma osoittaa, ettei fantasiaolentojen luonne ole ainoastaan merkityksellistettävissä ihmislajin määritelmin. Tämä kritiikkien tutkimus johdatellaan pääasiassa yhden örkin variaation kautta analysoimalla Netflixin tuottaman elokuvan *Brightin* örkkien esille tuomia kontekseja ja tähän lajiin liittyviä aihepiirejä.

Tutkielman johtoajatuksena on luoda örkille ei-ihmislähtöinen näkökulma ja samalla tuottaa örkin olemukselle ja lajille konteksti kritiikkien vaihtoehtoisten kontekstien kautta. Tutkielma myös havainnollistaa, että tämä ihmiskeskeisyys ja ihmislajin asettamiin arvoihin perustuva kritiikki ovat hankaloittaneet näiden olentojen kehitystä ja vähentäneet syvemmän akateemisen tutkimuksen tuottamista näistä olennoista. Kun näitä olentoja lähestytään muillakin kuin pääasiassa ihmislähtöisillä konteksteilla yhdessä niiden olemassa olevien yhteyksien kanssa, kuten populaarikulttuuristen, tällainen tutkimus tuottaa kokonaisvaltaisempia ja kuvaavampia luonnehdintoja ja näkökulmia näille kuvitelluille olennoille. Näin tehdessä örkkien ja muiden fantasiaolentojen uudelleenkontekstualisointi voi olla hyödyllistä myös muille ei-ihmislähtöisille teorioille ja keskusteluille, kuten esimerkiksi eläinetiikalle.

Koska fantasiaolennoista, saati örkeistä, ei ole kattavaa tutkimusta ja koska tämä tutkielma on kiinnostunut ihmislähtöisyydestä poikkeavasta lähestymisestä, pääasiallisina teorioina toimivat joukko aihealuetta yhdisteleviä teorioita. Keskeisiä niistä ovat eläinetiikka ja lajiin liittyvät keskustelut, populaarikulttuuritutkimus, transmediaalinen tarinankerronta sekä ekofeminismin ja ekokirjallisuuden tutkimuksen luomat teoreettiset konseptit. Tämä yhdistelevä lähestymistapa sekä fantasiaolentojen itsensä jatkuva levinneisyys osoittavat, että fantasiaolentojen tutkimukselle on nouseva tarve.

Asiasanat: fantasiaolento, *Bright*, örkki, konteksti, ihmiskeskeisyys, populaarikulttuuri

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Fantastical characters and creatures have been under an increasing trend of redefinition and re-evaluation as constituent parts of popular contemporary fiction. They are not only a means of entertainment but integral instruments of relatively politically neutral vessels through which current cultural, social and ideological questions are re-constructed. Fairly little theoretical attention, however, has been given to the underlying species in fantasy worlds whose nature and definitional life they are part of – they are fantasy *tropes*, after all. Furthermore, the approaches that have been applied to these creatures have been marked by the mirroring of the human point of view as well as real and lived histories. In other words, they are deployed and employed as inherently analogous to human activity. This thesis strives to reify this human-centrism as the sole identifier for nonhuman beings like fantasy creatures.

Naturally, both the booming demand and publishing of fantasy works, play a part in the direction the fantasy genre itself takes at each fluctuation, let alone its definitional constituents such as fantastical creatures, but the reasons behind each wave are far more nuanced and overlapping. These waves are, in turn, telling of the current trends of popular culture itself, the state of mind of the collective memory, and socio-cultural understanding of surrounding phenomena, but not necessarily always the other way around. In fact, culturality is generally associated with humans and naturality with animals and nonhuman fantastical beings, but both as concepts are, ideally, free of ownership, even when co-dependent in their most basic forms. Therefore, they are malleable to consider as driving concepts for non-human groupings as well. In addition, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, the focus species of orcs are specific in their connection to naturality and culturality as utilizing both simultaneously and respectively.

This thesis delves into the ways in which (academic) analysis and criticism have commonalized the imaginative fantastical species, particularly orcs, as select ideas of human action

analogy and how this has potentially previously harmed the natural development of some species like the Orc. In addition, it looks at how this criticism has, in fact, been hindered by its own human-centrism and, thus, the criticism tells more of the people critiquing rather than the subjects of criticism. The Orc especially has been analysed and depicted as uncivilized, uncultural, primitive, violent, static, and as derogative in its various characteristics' connections, such as closeness to nature and tribal structure, *as sum* to marginalized peoples in real life. Furthermore, the current approaches into orcs largely present these criticisms as inherent in the texts, when "a text is never really the issuing source of value, but always the site where the construction of value – variable values – can take place" (Storey *Cultural Theory* 208). The Orc has been treated as object but not subject. Human-centrism does not reflect fantasy species relations or their nature of being collectively enough, if at all.

Thus, by using a combination of nonhuman interested theoretical approaches, I will exhibit the Orc as a source for study in an alternative method to the human-centric ones. Because of orcs' dual being as natural and cultural, as beings of natureculture (Haraway 103), I will use concepts of environmental theory and ecofeminism to complement the popular culture theory. As I will demonstrate in later chapters especially, the Orc has an existing close relation to and agency in popular culture. Therefore, transmedia storytelling and popular culture memory serve as guiding theoretical concepts for the Orc's engagement in human cultures as beings themselves. In addition, I will use nonhuman ethics to discuss the harmfulness of treating orcs simply as projections of human action and concepts.

I analyse the contexts of the Orc, particularly in how the criticism the Orc has received has affected its stalemate status as a legitimate being and individual academic topic, the Orc as sentient and valuable. In doing this, I give the Orc a nonhuman perspective to accompany and complete the species' relative being as already in use. Secondly, I look at alternative approaches to these

criticisms' human-centric conceptualizations. In essence, I am (re)contextualizing the Orc and Orcism in connection to the criticism and use them as a representative of the incomplete treatment of fantastical beings. Through a case example text, Netflix's 2017 film *Bright* and its relations, I showcase how these continuing criticisms are insufficient to describe the multiplicity of fantastical beings as beings unto themselves and others. I am (re)representing the Orc as a species and a highly relational being and showcasing through analytical alternative contextualization examples the potential value of fantastical species as a fully-fledged research topic.

2 Of Theory and Texts

Social sciences and researchers of humanities in particular have become increasingly more involved in literary criticism as part of hybrid research – fantasy literature being one of these. In short, these fields of research no longer mainly concern themselves of the reality surrounding them and literary scholars of the imaginary realities of fictional works, but both cross-research their respective concepts by using ideas and frames from multiple theoretical fields. This hybridization has proven beneficial but has also created some base questions of consciousness and perception. That is, in applying theoretical frames from certain human-interested points of view, such as postcolonial readings for example, the habitants of the texts are assumed to be preliminarily applicable to this frame, whether these habitants are human or not. Because there is no holistic research into fantastical beings by themselves, this applied hybrid research is only giving a partial view into the nature of these beings. This research is also angled by human social interests, which leaves the beings' fantastical core, especially those of various *species*, as secondary and undermines their status as 'proper' beings. In other words, they are treated as recurring genre tropes available for imposed analyses and assumed to have inner logics based on these analyses without considering their evolving versatile nature. My research approaches these fantastical creatures as equal to sentient beings from the point of view of one specific species, the Orc.

This thesis is using theoretical texts as primary material in almost as much as any fictional text that is at the base structure of an analysis. To disclose a summary of each of the fields these examples are from and their preferred terminology and attitudes would be a feat for a book, or even a set of books, which obviously is not the purpose of a study such as this. The difficulty in examining patterns of recurring meaning-making behaviour and accompanying attitudes, such as those that are readings from specific human-interested frames, is precisely in their underlying nature. Because they are somewhat spontaneous, even if repetitively so, and underscore an imaginary line of discussion, they are hard to pinpoint as originating from and leading to something as clearly as their superimposing thread of argument. Discussion never is linear, which is why I emphasize that the criticism I in turn criticise is not a cartographic line retraceable as a successive plot, but instead a sense of latency that reappears in multiple discussions concerning fantasy creature topics.

Instead, I will refer to the existing criticism via examples, primarily from social sciences because of their interest in fantasy creatures, human-oriented as they are. In the presented criticism of rocs, I will draw largely on Helen Young's and Jessica Langer's works, especially in chapter 3, because they are of the few who have made more concentrated efforts to study the Orc as a species, although in particular human frames: orcs as carrying implicit racial logic and orcs as postcolonial subjects. This is not meant as a personal attack on the authors themselves, but simply a convenient way of condensing the sporadic extempore of the criticism towards the topic at hand here.

Leaning on this veiled dormancy of attitudes, I stress that my approach, while highly cognisant of the fantasy genre and its conventions, is not strictly from a genre theory standpoint. It is genre-specific but not exclusively focused on the fantasy genre, as these creatures have migrated to genre-combining texts, such as my primary text. My intention is to re-examine the genre fiction's inner plot devices and logics, or more specifically the genre's active world participants, the species. I will examine them, firstly, in light of the loaded critical analysis and criticism that they receive, and,

secondly, with the help of cultural studies and critical environmental theory, showcase how the criticism, perhaps unintentionally, facilitates fantasy's integral occupants as foreign to their own worlds. I use these more macrolevel concepts rather than genre theory in approaching the texts here because (1) the main case example film is not decidedly *only* a work of the fantasy genre and (2) the key tool concepts, speciesism and popular culture memory especially, apply to the popular culture and literary collective relation, both socio-cultural and socio-literary realities as cooperative entities (Kukkonen 271). The environmental ethics theory offers a similar set of wider modes and means for approaching texts, namely in that the reader needs to adopt a nonhuman perspective, if possible, in reading texts concerning nonhuman world interpreters in a non-realist world.

Moving forward, I use 'text' to indicate the umbrella understanding of (fictional) works, which includes not only the traditional written text but also other modes like films, series, games, comics et cetera. A text, as I use in this thesis, is more than a finished tangible product: an open work that continues to gather meanings and, in turn, creates meaning (see Taylor 27). Similar to text, I emphasize that the reader in my thesis is not exclusively a reader of written texts but entails the interpreter role, the negotiation process of reader influencing the text and the text influencing the reader as inseparably present in reading. A reading is both individual and social, a text is personal and cultural (Fiske 321). Also, I avoid using 'audience', despite the primary text being a film, to not confuse this with a passive receptor role and the implicit target audience implemented in a text – 'implied reader' coined by Wolfgang Iser, further used in psychological approaches, for example Vierkant.

As a general rule, I treat fantasy in this thesis as understood in the classic work *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) by Clute and Grant. They agree, along the lines of Brian Attebery, that fantasy is a "fuzzy set" genre (Clute & Grant 337) – that is, fantasy is "a grouping defined not by boundaries but by central examples" and "moves outwards from its central examples into water

margins where clear boundaries do not exist (Clute & Grant 71, Attebery 12-13). In other words, I use fantasy in the liberal sense of the genre: as a mode that constantly lives in fluidity by negotiating each text as placing in centrality (e.g. Tolkenian high fantasy) or liminality (texts involving fantastical elements in realist worlds) in relation to texts and their readers. Fantasy is a departure from the real but not 'unreal', a re-imagination of what is possible (G. Wolfe "The Encounter" 68, Irwin 4). Not only fantastic texts but fantastic subgenres act in such a way. It is this nature of flow that has, perhaps, discouraged academia in the past, and to an extent still does, to engage in the fantasy realm beings and their genre-culture as legitimate. However, fantasy's rapidly increasing popularity and proliferation has also brought attention to its influence on popular culture as a sincere platform for socio-cultural discourse (Harvey 16). While fantasy texts have generated interest from literary scholars to social sciences, thus bringing fantasy a more secure place as serious literature rather than 'populist' (see Storey *Cultural Theory* 219), some central elements like tropes, recurring common literary devices (e.g. species/creatures) or rhetorical themes, have remained either unnoticed or narrowly applied as correspondent to human frames.

Because of the nature of fantasy and the interests of undertones in analysing fantasy species of this thesis, the concept of *popular culture memory* seems acutely fitting. While coined by Karin Kukkonen , it originates from Jan Assmann's work on the "cultural memory" of social communities, which indicates the "collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (126). Assmann distinguishes between everyday memory and a more specific cultural memory that involves a more complex process of introspection and self-imagination (129-130), already driving for a distinction between a lower and higher standard of conceptualization.

Popular culture has been formulated as the everyday, as average and commonplace, especially in arts and literature considered popular and informal (see e.g. Storey *Cultural Theory*

226). To a degree, the phenomenon is mundane precisely because it involves the everyday life. However, simplifying the progresses and processes at work in this everyday meaning-making of the multitude of texts encountered, especially in modern multimodally bountiful communication and exchange, leaves out an important practice in the overall collection of cultural memory: the affective consumption (Storey *Cultural Theory* 226). In addition, the fantasy genre has been connected as "pulp" (see G. Wolfe "Evaporating" 22-23). Therefore, Kukkonen's *popular cultural memory*, "a repository of conventions and imagery that are continually reconstructed in contemporary popular culture" (261), serves as a more effective concept and term for my approach that is deeply imbedded in popular culture imagery and discourse and uses text examples considered as part of this popular rather than literary canon. Fantasy in itself includes debates over what is shared and accepted as canon by fans and others in fandoms and multimedia verses – used commonly to refer to the expanded universe of texts, like Potterverse. In doing this, readers employ literary criticism – albeit less theoretically rooted – and, therefore, this implies collective intellectual negotiation and community practices in using textual tropes like fantasy species as akin to the intelligence and social relation of larger structures like pop culture (see Jenkins "Interactive Audiences" 137). Therefore, I have included such wiki verses as key sources in analysis to emphasize the Orc's discursive presence.

The concept is not without issue, then, because in specifying the term by *popular*, the approach essentially leaves out the other binary, high culture and canon, of its central practice. Considering my approach is only faintly based on the continuum of the discourse whether some forms or modes of art, such as fantasy genre tropes, is populist and lowbrow (see Bru 6, G. Wolfe "Malebolge" 3-4), this seems like an oversight. My intention is not to valuate fantasy's position as either-or but to examine as how this, nowadays more implicit, discussion has potentially affected the genre's inner conventions and tropes, such as species relations, through suppositions imposed from outside and atop. I do not directly contemplate this binary thinking of low and high culture

literacies' rightness. Although, especially in chapters 4 and 5, I will consider how the connection between fantasy and popular culture work in tandem to maintain a sense of an underdog image to their advantage. Instead, I argue why the genre's and its creatures' persistent positioning as arbitrarily popular is potentially problematic and even on occasion harmful in cases such as fantasy which, as I understand it here, exists somewhere between the imaginary border of high and low art or is interlocked with both. While I prefer the latter, whichever way it is visually preferably perceived matters not, only that they exist and perform as an ongoing medial and cultural carriers. The continued debate is, however, useful to keep in mind as the underdog nature of fantasy tropes like species can still be seen in the common criticisms they receive.

The concept of popular culture memory offers a means of identifying this culturality of fantasy with its surrounding relational culture, largely popular culture, in terms of a definitive social theoretical tool but is somewhat lacking in that it does not emphasize the memory processes as emotionally interrelational. That is, they are not simply collected, stored and cashed-out two-dimensionally as elements but also invoke affective memories with built-in meanings (Harvey 2-3, 6). This is where transmedia storytelling, a close relative of meaning-making as reminiscent of memory metaphor, notably refined by Harvey and Jenkins, respectively, supplements Kukkonen's concept. After all, it "represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (Jenkins "Transmedia" 944). As will become notable, especially in chapter 5, not only is speculative fiction or the fantastic genres as Gary Wolfe names fantasy, science fiction and horror, in a unique position as the principal primary material for transmedia storytelling to derive from but also as the theoretical concept's contributing co-creator (Jenkins "Transmedia" 944).

Because of the sparse theoretical writings on fantasy creatures and species – that is, as tropes of their genre-world or as beings onto themselves and not as capitulated representations of one or more human social phenomena – I borrow some ideological models and terms from environmental literary criticism and nonhuman ethics to complement the former. Namely, I apply the concept of speciesism and the very simple imaginative exercise of asking "how would a nonhuman, like an orc, approach this topic or issue?". The latter is more employed by literary writers and readers than academics, perhaps, but it offers a simple means of retracing the linguistic and rhetorical methods of estranging a human perception to nonhuman characters. Since estrangement, the "imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Parrinder 37), is a central strategy in the fantastical genres, it carries certain alliance with environmental and ecocritical literature with their nonhuman character interests. Somewhat evocative of the posthumanist thought, more prominent in the sister genre science fiction, the idea is "to participate in—and *find a mode of thought* adequate to—" (C. Wolfe xviii, emphasis added) "processes which can never be entirely reduced to patterns or standards, codes or information" (Rutsky 111). Thus, I am finding a mode of thought for the Orc as a being by re-examining its human-dominated contexts.

While my approach will not include the posthumanist or environmental theory as such, they present a combined critical perspective, together with the previously mentioned popular culture memory and transmedial storytelling, for trying to see whether there is, indeed, a palpable reason(s) for *not* constricting fantasy species to exclusively human concepts as has, to date, been the case in general analytic consensus. In addition, the natural and cultural are not strict theoretical lenses but, as will become evident, they become important larger thematic contexts for the contexts I am examining because of the very core natureculturenes, the close intertwined relatedness of culture and nature together (Haraway 104), of fantasy species. My approach into the multiple contexts that

fantastical species and creatures embody and relate to as “livable politics” is reminiscent of Donna Haraway’s “scholarly foray” (95-96). Indeed, I find Farah Mendlesohn’s words of her approach appropriate to mine, only with minor changes of my particular interest, naturally,

> This [thesis] is the result of an extended thought experiment. It is not intended -- to say “this is how you do x kind of fantasy.” It is intended solely in terms of “this is what I observe over a wide range of texts.” It is an exercise in almost pure Reason—a rather old-fashioned approach to criticism, I am aware. I have used other critics where I found them helpful, but there is surprisingly little written on the [species] of the fantastic. (XVI)

Because of the limited amount of previous holistic research on fantasy species – again, ‘de-human’ conceptualization – and because of the nonhuman-centric interest of my thesis, I have not chosen another specific lens or reading frame provided by largely human sociality focused fields. Instead, I use the Orc as a point of reference, a possible self rather than as the marginalized other it has been positioned, through which the species’ contexts are analysed. I am giving voice to the Orc as a diplomat for fantastical species relations.

To illustrate further, if we use a figurative lens, a theoretical frame of mind as a preconceived approach to subjects, we are taking a position, we are initially positing ourselves as investigators of a laid-out plan, not in what we can find, but what can we find in terms of x? To use an analogy, we are solving a gruesome scene as murder, when the scene might be, for example, that of involuntary manslaughter or a missing person hurt in an unknown process/event. In positing the deconstructing, the solving, as a mystery of murder from the start, the means as to how we reach the conclusion, murder, is immediately coloured with ‘clear’ evidence of murderous *intent*. In approaching something not completely human, or simply nonhuman as with fantasy species, with purely human-generated ideas, constructs and real histories, we are bound to find evidence of humanity in the nonhuman.

Lastly, the primary texts, like the theoretical ones, are used as intermittently appropriate to explain and help each section to depict the current understanding of orcs, and on occasion other species, with one exception: I will use Netflix's *Bright* (2017), directed by David Ayer, as my main primary text to maintain a sense of consensus for the case example species, the Orc, through this one variation of the Orc to which the others are proportioned. It bears in mind that while I concentrate on one species quite specifically, the idea is not to create an exhaustive work of the Orc or fantasy species per se. Instead, I intend to see, through one species that has had perhaps the most negatively associated (re)configurations, how these affect the larger species composition or lack of such. I will also examine what these connotations and critiques tell of the attitudes towards fantasy and its species, and whether there is a possible alternative context to common critical connections. I argue that there remains, in these analytic workings about species and fantasy, a distinct scepticism to their legitimacy as beings of their own and not just props of their world. Therefore, this easily leads to a rather raw ease of dismissal to mirror whichever human social discourse is presently debated as appropriate to specific species, such as racial logics in orcs.

Bright is an urban fantasy imagination of present-day Los Angeles, an infusion of fantasy elements, namely magic and fantasy species, into a buddy-cop narrative. Fantasy species and creatures have lived together with humans for over two thousand years, together surviving and defeating the elven Dark Lord intending to rule by dark magical arts so long ago. In the aftermath of a majority of orcs choosing to side with the Dark Lord, they have been prejudiced against in society, with the other nine major fantasy species in the fight prospering respectively in an urbanizing world – now, banned of magical practice and use. However, in present day Los Angeles, a powerful wand is found during a routine call by two police officers: Daryl Ward, a human veteran recovering from a gunshot wound, and Nick Jakoby, the first orc police officer and a rookie. The elven girl, Tikka, is a Bright, a being able to use a wand without being destroyed in the process, on the run from a fanatical

faction of elven worshippers of the Dark Lord's prophesized return. The wand insinuates a chase of a journey which opens personal wounds for the two partners as they escort Tikka and the wand through town with various entities trying to obtain their 'routine call'. The film employs explicit social commentary particularly on orcs' continued connection to marginalized groups.

3 Outside Humanity, Towards Orc-ism

Humans cannot escape humanity. In Darwinian idealism, they are inherently selfish as the 'fittest' creatures of the Earth and, therefore, cannot fully endorse any escapism of identity, cultural or personal. While anthropocentrism is a historically constructed and strongly imbedded perception in human thinking to the extent of being 'common sense' (Woodhall 45), it is, indeed, a perception, a point of view. Fantasy has been described as escapist (see e.g. Jackson 17), when in fact it, along with other speculative fiction, is perhaps more involved in larger issues than many other realist fictions present and are presented to be, as this thesis will continuously point out. As Sascha Bru states, "popular culture is always the ground on which historical changes and cultural transformations are worked" (7), and since fantasy is an integral co-producer in formations and understandings of popular culture, it follows that fantasy, too, is an important infrastructure on which larger questions are discussed if not formulated (see also G. Wolfe "The Encounter" 72). This has been growingly evident in discussions of race, gender, sexuality, politics, and many other topics of socio-cultural involvement in fantasy alone, both in everyday discussion as well as in academia (e.g. Young and McMahon-Coleman & Weaver). For a genre that is propositioned as non-realist, idealist and most often romanticist, even in its grittiest narratives, majority of the academic dialogue surrounding this genre-culture is fairly homogenous in its inability to escape human-centric reality – the reality as humans perceive it to be, at least.

One of the concurrent issues in the dialogue of fantasy and human relations is exactly that – the discussion is foregrounded in the supposition that humans are the status quo of any given component inside the respective fantasy world and the one they physically occupy (cf. Hayward's "anthropocentrism as ineliminable", 57). If any of the supposed inherent qualities of orcs, such as connections to marginalized groups like natives (Young 97), are brought to the forefront in a text, they have necessarily involved introspective choices, like using human-societal theory lenses that have been more or less consciously valued as proper or not to use in analysis. In addition, these findings are retroactively, consecutively so, re-valued in terms of the single human social concept, like racial undertones, among its siblings, like racial discrimination or postcolonialism. During these processes, the Orc as a species is secondary to the human conceptual findings, effectively marginalizing the Orc in the processes themselves as well as in connecting them to one or more of marginalized groups of reality, like natives or black people, based on certain attributes. They are constantly othered – negatively so.

Any decisive action such as differentiation of the self and the other imaginations implies that further logics, ethics, morals, and valuation has already been processed and, moreover, are still in progress (Khatib 69). Thus, partly because the Orc and other species have no extensive theoretical works with them at the forefront, they are easily assumed to be an other of one form or another in analysis concerning them. There is no frame *of* them to offer a counterargument *for* them. Not only are there sibling theories to consider, other than genre or specific humanities theories, when attempting to formulate hypothesis of one primary textual trope like the Orc, but it also bears in mind that the ordinary reader considers the sibling texts and through them the variations of orcs as well, even if on seemingly subconscious level at first. The everyday consumers and analytical contributors, the readers, who also take part in the consensus of Orcism, are often excluded in the inherent criticisms of orcs. The Orc is naturally and culturally created in the interplay between

creator and reader, not just in-text but cross-textually. This is where Haraway's proposed natureculturenes of nonhuman beings becomes prominent as orcs have both evolved (naturally) and been evolved or cultivated (culturally) as intertwined, not separately (see 100-101).

This line of argument, of course, supposes that every text *and* reading is inherently intertextual in nature, that "any form of interrelation between any number of texts, from the instances of clear reactions of one text to another (as in parody, for example) to the more general idea that there is not a single text that does not possess traces of other texts within itself" (Lesic-Thomas 1) is inescapable and fundamental. I fully accept such perceptions of literary culturalism (cf. transmedial storytelling), as it is as much inescapable as playing a game without applying previous experience of play, playing and ludic-imprinted knowledge or, really, any repetitive action creating a certain knowledge-habitus. In fact, I would argue, in the lines of classic ludic and play theorists such as Huizinga, that play and playing is so inherent in human thinking and action that it is invisible to the daily processive conscious-mind. We enact actions and knowledge that have existed and been practiced since childhood, and which are present in everyday structures of societies (Huizinga 4). These processes and lines of thinking are, interestingly, non-exclusive to humans: consider animals using play as practice for future fights and/or asserting dominance, and play as a sign of interrelational acceptance and affection (see Haraway 129,137). Thus, it is tangible to see fantastical beings, which could be thought of as hybridizing human and animal features in addition to the mystical 'otherness' of fantasy imaginative, as also susceptible to interconnected, subconscious, and socially passed action-knowledges of their own.

The human-centrism becomes even more problematic in considering the fantasy genre's display of multiple species in an imagined world, regardless of its eventual connections to the physical now-reality. I will use this term to denote to the reality humans occupy, as calling it *our* reality would be counterproductive to the larger argument of human-centrism of my thesis. "Now"

can be either the position the chronological and static standpoint of the world this thesis was written in as well as the more fuzzy notion of nowness indicating the ideological atmosphere of the present world, which at the time of reading, at any point, will already be different. Any ownership of a world by one species alone is, in fact, one of the spontaneously but irrevocably occurring blunders that even seasoned critical analysts seem to illustrate in trying to argue against the very notion of ownership of any kind. This is one of the underlying angles of criticism in which anthropocentrism and positing human as the centre present themselves as harmful to nonhumans like orcs. When something as imaginative in basis as fantasy fiction is conducted as objectivized property, even if just conceptually mirroring 'our' reality, it is no wonder that issues of race, gender, sexuality et cetera are problematized in individual readings and let alone in shared conceptual consensuses.

In this chapter I will look at this human-centric issue in context of a single species of nonhuman character, the Orc, by moving slowly outwards of human-centrism with alternative approaches. These steps towards defining and understanding what Orcism is are, then, initially biased as human-relational but this is a necessary process to indicate the current stigma of nonhuman viewpoint, or lack thereof, of why treating fantasy species as interchangeable in concepts to humans is precarious and questionable. As Mendlesohn writes, "my contention is that the failure to grasp the stylistic needs of a particular category of fantasy may undermine the effectiveness of an otherwise interesting idea" (15), fantasy species are extracted from their context while simultaneously enclosed into their respective structures by appointed approaches.

Firstly, I will consider the Orc as a species in relation to anthropocentrism and speciesism, two terms borrowed from environmental and nonhuman ethics, of which I will draw theoretical inspiration to attempt to unclog the block of human-related contexts suppressing fantasy species. Secondly, the two terms quite callously used in fantasy as more or less synonymous, race and species, are examined in the context of fantasy species as definitive groups of beings. Thirdly, a

closer reading of selected Orc phenotypes and attributes are considered, particularly in connection to the orcs presented in *Bright*, in light of the critiques these attributes receive and why these critiques are harmful. I will provide recontextualizations for these attributes by using other variations of orcs as well as theoretical considerations to complement the analysis. Finally, I will collect the attributes of *Bright*-orcs to a species profile in order to see what this variation brings to the discussion of fantasy species relations.

3.1 A Species Without A Little Speciesism Does Not Exist?

Human-centrism is not to be confused with anthropocentrism in this thesis, even though they share a common contextual history and present-day prevalent association. I deliberately avoid using the term anthropocentrism exclusively, as the term implies "(i) interpreting or regarding the world in terms of human values, experiences, or thoughts, and (ii) considering humans as the most important, significant, or central entity that exists" (Woodhall 23). It also manifests in smaller units, in anthropomorphications of linguistic metaphors, which partly uphold the human-centrism of even the furthest attempts in counter productions of human description and perception, such as speculative fiction. In short, this term implies a sort of worldwide attitude-behavioural notion of human worldview, valuation and intellect, and inherent species discrimination either as a collective or individually (Woodhall 44, Varner "Justifying" 121). It is too disorganized as a term to incorporate my more specific interest of genre-related questions of interspecies relations.

I will, instead, use anthropocentrism when directly referencing the problematic base-structure of human worldview as a seemingly acknowledged norm of perception and human-centrism when discussing the human-originated concepts which are then applied, as such, to nonhuman species. In other words, anthropocentrism includes the notion of ineliminable human perception (Hayward 56), human as the intelligence or "modus operandi" *for* the world (Woodhall

26), and human superiority. In contrast, human-centrism centres the human as the normative self to which other species are described, othered, often as superior or inferior – human as the valuer and valuable. For example, in assuming that the human perception is inescapable in considering the fantasy world, that human worldview is so inherent of body and mind of human reading that it is impossible to detach from it and therefore *not* see things from human perspective, is anthropocentrism. Human-centrism is the positioning of the real human and the in-text human and their favoured values as the normal on an imaginative evaluative axis, the point of 'right' reference (see Hayward 53), to which the Orc is compared as inferior, for example. Anthropocentrism is in-text positioning of human perception as an assumed normal. Human-centrism is mostly outside-text imposed human interests and analogies, truths or logics, as the more relevant ones (see Woodhall 9) in selected texts as well as the assumption that the texts themselves present an innate human centrality.

Of course, this distinction is not entirely unproblematic as the latter implies evaluation *to* humans even when the protagonist is not a member of the species, which makes the human as a species not only the more acceptable norm but more desirable or superior one in the end, because the others are compared to that particular species over any others. The human is, indeed, ineliminable. However, I distinguish more on the already perceptualized uses rather than specific valuated ethics of the terms in my thesis. Woodhall and Hayward use the term "human chauvinism" to describe the very similar concept I use as human-centric (Woodhall 17, Hayward 53), but in order to avoid unnecessary implied negative connotations that chauvinism represents towards humans in turn, I prefer human-centrism, even with its internal problematics.

It is useful to keep in mind that so far fantasy, as a subcategory of speculative fiction and further to fiction, has operated under this very common assumption of humans as the sole proprietor of world intelligence and therefore the point of reference for intellectual concepts. At

least, this is how the genre has been *made to be seen* by using human-centric concepts to identify and criticize the respective text worlds and their inhabitants. Indeed, anthropocentrism in itself is not rejected here, but the ways in which the human as species *norma* and using human socio-cultural concepts in reading texts involving the paranormal and the imagined 'abnormal' as well as implying inherent analogical truths of human concepts are questioned.

There has been, for some time now, a contestation for the species discriminating implicitness of human thinking in nonhuman (animal) and environmental ethics in particular (e.g. Jamieson 102), but so far this has not been extensively applied to fantastical texts or extended to others than animals. Because many classic fantasy species are humanoid in appearance and *mostly* follow *similar* social structurings, they are easily seen as interchangeably applicable to human concepts of societal behaviour and ethics as well. They are not, however, the same being as the human and, therefore, have their own set of moralities on what is accepted as qualities that express and are considered 'good or bad' (Pluhar 331). As Woodhall argues, "anthropocentric theories consider value, interests, preferences, and value of lives, *from the human perspective*, rather than giving fair weight to *all* nonhuman capacities, interests, preferences and lives" (82, emphasis original).

This concerns orcs' individual and collective nature of being, only one aspect of which their species is as they are no longer a homogenized mass. Treating them as hordes or masses reveals the human-centrism of analysis (see Woodhall 101). Saying that the Orc as a species is lacking because it does not denote to values that humans have accepted as (morally) relevant qualities is similar to arguing that the species is only relevant as a warning example, like those of fairy tale monsters supposedly created to scare and teach, rather than as a sentient set of beings of their own accord. As Woodhall argues, "'human' societies that include nonhuman animals [here, orcs] are structured in a way that favours humans and results in harms for nonhumans and *shows a lack of considering*

what nonhuman animals value which humans do not" (102, emphasis added). Any fantasy species alone is not *only* subservient to the human favoured intelligence and valuation but a double standard, as it were. Orcs are read by humans with human values but can also be supplemented and contrasted by the values presented by the orcs in texts. They are an other species, even with their origins of human imagination, and have evolved beyond simplistic notions of caricature. There is value in realizing this significance of treating them as arbitrary, not entirely like animals, to the human interpreter's own ethics and ways of approaching subjects.

In fact, environmentalist critique and ethics have adopted the term of speciesism to describe the different ethical discussions of nonhuman and human relations. Popularized by Peter Singer in *Animal Liberations*, the term has since been reworked, among most notably by Horta, who argues that "speciesism is the unjustified disadvantageous consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to one or more particular species" (247). Further, if "having such cognitive capacities [self-consciousness] allows individuals [humans] to have larger sets of interests, and this allows their lives to contain more value", then ignoring "this special value would be a kind of reverse speciesism" (Varner "Speciesism" 172). That is, ignoring 'proven' advanced characteristic(s) of one species, like the human's intelligence, is speciesism as negatively understood. If, for example, a plant or animal species does not equal in its capacity of realizing and interpreting its own existence with humans, then it is 'less valuable', and speciesism as favouring members of one species over another is 'justified'.

This valuation aspect of 'unjustified' is questionable as it implies an authoritative use of discrimination of one species over the other: What in each case is determinable as 'valuable'? Who is the authority that decides justification or injustice of a given situation, attitude or action? Is not 'unjustified' inherently discriminative regardless who decides the qualifications? I agree with Jaquet in that while analogous uses, such as parallelisms to racism and sexism, are useful as indicators of

the idea of speciesism (455), the term itself should remain descriptive of the phenomenon of differing attitudes and action-behaviours on exclusively species-originated bases rather than inherently negatively evaluative (speciesist-racist). I follow the more universal descriptive sense of speciesism as favouring of one species over one or more other species (Varner "Speciesism" 173).

Thus, calling some entity, individual or group, 'speciesist' would not necessitate derogatory positioning of certain attributes as valued or not, but perhaps a more ego-centric position of one species, one's own species usually, as the main interest. It illustrates that basing critique on attributes, ones imposed and popularized by humans no less, of one or more members of a species simply because they are members *of* the species is certainly questionable, as has been the case with fantasy species. In the literary past, the Orc as species-collectively has been described by mostly derogative attributes, such as violence and low-intelligence. Then, these are connected via other attributes, like skin-colour or nature connectivity, to a margin group that has *historically fabricated in literature* similar but *in reality* not strictly the same attributes. Important in both of these is that these attributes' degrading quality are not only valued by mainly outside-group members but are also extracted from narrativized or fabulated versions of groups. This creates a loop of degradation and reflects not most strongly on the two parties being connected but to the one connecting them. As the popular saying goes, "assumption is the mother of failures"[1], so positing some beings as epitomic representatives of their species based on the *representative* assumption already creates a base of value-laden interpretation.

Speciesism is, then, closely related to the concepts of difference and alterity. Difference indicates a more Lacanian sense of the Other that defines me/us in terms of differing to you/them, whether relating to ethnicity, gender, sexuality or any other socially constructed concept that only

[1] The saying is credited to Eugene Lewis Fordsworthe, but the 'true' origins is hard to back-trace due to its popularity and different variations.

in some cases carry distinct physical traits as denoting the non-physical (Young 7). Difference is inherently evaluative simply by appointing *a* perception from which to begin identity formation. That is, this perception is identifying 'the self' as the norm and the differing 'other' as partially same but simultaneously, by certain attributions of physical and/or non-physical basis, as denoting a fundamental otherness. This self/other and the act of othering have been used and contested by multiple fields, primarily social sciences, as the basic ideology of the present from which theorists and analysists attempt to formulate alternative approaches to dilute the stark distancing effect of a binary us/them. In contrast, "alterity disrupts the illusion of selfsameness on the level of the subject's body, her psyche, and her language, dislodging the subject – both on an individual and a collective level – from an ontology of origins and essences" (Peeren & Horskotte 10). This promotes the parallel consciousness of the self and the other as represented projections of each other that are in constant fluctuation in different textual presentations. If one alters, the other fluctuates as well but not as strict binary opposite.

Indeed, it is precisely the parallelism that eludes many of the critics of fantasy species in selected presentations: For example, the Orc is a violent being to various degrees – there is little evidence to deny this altogether – and orcs, such as the ones from Blizzard's *World of Warcraft*, "have dark (green) skin, fangs, stocky bodies, and wide, grimacing mouths: all symbols of aggression and unattractiveness in Western culture" (Langer 98). They are, thus, criticised for being "savage" (Langer 91) because humans deem violence and features like the former as universally 'bad' or unwanted. This savagery together with their primitive lifestyle, mainly tribal culture and nature spirituality, is forwarded as a marker towards them being reimaginations of colonial subjects (Langer 91), or fabulations of them at least. The fact that Langer is examining a game, *World of Warcraft*, which is narratively based on 'playing war', is fairly one-dimensionally applied by war seen as representing the "split" between postcolonial and the colonialized (92). The violence of orcs is often

assumed to be their species specifier somehow biologically or otherwise inherently, but this "savage" violence occurs at times of war – are not the other species, humans included, violent and unattractive beings at such times in these texts as well? Are humans or elves not violent in general?

Thus, the species is uprooted from its own individual context (e.g. war, game, multispecies world, adventure) by universally applying certain attributive feature *n(s)*, like violence, physical markers or tribal culture, as representing something inter-textually and group-specifically – orcs as (noble) savages and denoting real margin groups (Langer 93). At the same time, their specific intra-text place, fantasy worlds occupied by multiple species, is disillusioned as inherently representative of phenomenon *x*, like postcolonial othering, by the same attribute *n*(s). Not only is the Orc's inter-textual being but its intra-textual being in specific texts constantly presented as negative in analysing with specific human concepts in mind. That is, the species is pre-constructed, before moving to analysis, as personifying and implicitly reinforcing a certain concept, like a colonial subject, by certain attributes while at the same time a related conceptual phenomenon, like postcolonialism, on the singular world level is augmented from above. Not only is the Orc itself but how it relates to its world presented as inherently evocative of these phenomena. The orcs are at an impasse in this.

In this example as well as in many other cases of the Orc as one of the fantasy world's species, there is the presence of humans to reinforce a sense of othering. In other words, the reader is supposedly maneuvered into thinking the protagonist, usually a human, as the de facto normative self simply by being present in the world, let alone the point of view. This is often supported by the identity being engineered by the contrasts, such as ease of violence, that the other [species] represents as unfavourable to humans (cf. Chang's "Bod identifying self as mirroring to Liza", 12). Thus, the self is promoted as the dominant desirability of identity (human/Western/hetero etc.) and the other as marginal (nonhuman/non-Western/queer etc.) or even undesirable. The very formation *non-* as I have presented in reflecting regular use of nonhuman is, in fact, an issue itself

as it positions the following entity for the prefix as the norm to which the othered non-representative is lumped as a universal other. However, to limit the scope of this thesis I leave further semantic discussion of this linguistic terminology to its own field-specific dissent. I only suggest a more explicit awareness of use of terminology in analysing and critiquing social concepts with pre-charged choices of words (cf. the species/race discussion below).

Then, what if point of view is not the inherent marker of selfness? What if it is rejected? Is the presence of humans in a text with other sentient species immediately favourable to humanity? Firstly, it is continuously presented that creators of texts, subconsciously or not, produce textual representations that "reflect the designers' views of their own cultures, a viewpoint that is taken on by gamers [i.e. readers] through interaction with the virtual [textual] environment" (Schwartz 321). Secondly, the reader is far too easily assumed to be a sponge that simply absorbs explicit and implicit meanings 'as is' without outside help (Storey *Cultural Theory* 221-222), be they academic critique or extra-textual material – lore, fandoms, social discourse et cetera. They are essentially illustrated as both blind victim and active enforcer, simultaneously, by rendering them the status of "identity tourist" (Nakamura 39) in an imagined space-world created for "virtual tourism" (Schwartz 315). Further, it is readily assumed that even in attempting to subvert or reject these implications, the reader participates in maintaining the prevalent ideas (Langer 88). This is because of the supposed fundamentalism of social constructs, such as Langer's postcolonialism or Young's racial logic of orcs (107), in texts that support these constructs by implicit meanings in certain attributes, such as nature-oriented spirituality's connection to natives. Thirdly, this foundationalism is assumed as a static fact or logic that, despite efforts to the contrary like the orcs' racial variation in-text, remains steadfast.

Furthermore, even in using predominantly fantastical texts, critics often seemingly 'forget' the placing and placeness of fantasy species – that is, these species, especially orcs, are analysed,

not primarily as integral parts of the world structure and ideology, but as loaded entities of the now-reality on themselves. In effect, they are othered by employing othered ideologies as their main identifiers. They are presented to have little to no significance beyond their relationship to humans, whether conceptual or narrativized. Thus, their identity development is blocked by constant de-negotiation rather than re-negotiation because they are somewhat denied the opportunity to present an identity with them as the self rather than the pre-determined other. To compare, consider Nick's words to Ward in *Bright* as they regroup at the service station after Leilah's attack on the club: "With humans, you understand, everything is so definite. Like, you say something, and, all of a sudden, it's law, and you can't walk it back". Once humans 'get comfortable' with an idea or performance, it is difficult to alternate the course or present a parallelly moving alternative with equal residence, because the first already seems logical. The Orc's place – historical, genre-specific and nonhuman relational – in fantasy is sidelined and they become placeless stereotypes onto themselves.

In analysing the orcs, I recognize the parallel placelessness of the Orc as created by outside influence and its in-textual incapacity to fully deliver a nonhuman perspective to redeem the species placeness. As such, my analysis reflects that "the interruption of identity by alterity *prompts* a taking place, a performative event where the self *is forced* to take a position in relation to otherness and its specific form [e.g. genre trope]" and that "the self *has to* take a stand, claim a place, and re-assert an identity that can no longer remain the same" (Peeren & Horskotte 11, emphases added). In other words, I am forced to initially take the position of human perception in analysing the orcs and largely conceptualize their identity through human concepts (cf. Hayward's "human features as benchmarks" 56). This is, then, somewhat countering of the very criticism of human-centrism in deconstructing fantasy species I maintain. My attempt to see whether there is an alternative view to this, whether there is a plausible and actionable Orc identity as an independent species not bound

by prevailing human logics, hopefully only strengthens my quest for more awareness for the paradoxality of species employment.

The questions of speciesism, especially in the case of orcs or any fantasy species for that matter, predominantly culminate in the use of terminology, linguistic use and visualizations of the species. While terms and words themselves are not inherently biased, the concurrent connections and associations being related to these terms are heavily loaded not only with historical relations but with current trending contentions as well. Fantasy species are more often termed as fantasy *creatures* or beasts, but upon reflection these wordings denote a negative abnormality, "something created either animate or inanimate: such as (a) a lower animal -- or (c) a being of anomalous or uncertain aspect or nature // creatures of fantasy" (Merriam-Webster). As fantasy species and individual beings are imaginative, they hold a certain "anomality" and "uncertainty", but they also hold negative associations of inanimateness ('unliving') and undesirability. For the purposes of this thesis, I will treat 'creature', even with its questionable associations, as the genus for the various fantastical beings and species to designate certain fantasy groups that showcase a species-relatedness (see below) and are transmedially multiple rather than singular. This possible negative association by terminology is also why I have not incorporated monster theory as a key frame.

Race in particular has become somewhat synonymous with certain fantasy species when in fact they are not completely discernible as races but as species, as will become evident during this thesis. If we look at the definitions of the terms in two commonly used dictionaries (Oxford Dictionary in academia and Merriam-Webster in public), an underlying influence of perspective can be found:

> Species: "A group of organisms that resemble one another closely in appearance and genetic makeup. Members of a species can breed with others of the same species but generally not with other, even closely related, species. In taxonomy, a species is the division below a genus."
>
> (Oxford Dictionary of Public Health)

To compare, Merriam-Webster defines species as a set of variable meanings: “(a) kind or sort”, “(b) a class of individuals having common attributes and designated by a common name, specifically a logical division of a genus or more comprehensive class, or “(c) the human race: human beings — often used with *the”*. As can be seen in these definitions, the more biological and scientifically ones involving species, with the exception of (c) by Merriam-Webster, are more neutral as perspectivized descriptions.

In comparison, nearly all concerning race are subjectified, pre-normalized as human. Similarly, concerning race, only the ones stemming from biology and utilizing the associated etymology of species/subspecies relation remain as species neutral:

> (in biology) A category used in the classification of organisms that consists of a group of individuals within a species that are geographically, ecologically, physiologically, or chromosomally distinct from other members of the species. The term is frequently used in the same sense as subspecies. Physiological races, for example, are identical in appearance but differ in function. –
>
> (in anthropology) A distinct human type possessing several characteristics that are genetically inherited. The major races are Mongolian, Caucasian, and Ethiopian. (Oxford Dictionary of Biology)

These definitions are already different by their point of origin, their interest of definition. Merriam-Webster, again, includes various definitions for race, such as “(2a) a family, tribe, people, or nation belonging to the same stock”, “(2b) a class or kind of people unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics”, or “(3s) an actually or potentially interbreeding group within a species, also a taxonomic category (such as a subspecies) representing such a group”. All include a human-centric point of reference and human conceptualization with the exception of few, such as “(3b) breed” or “(3c) a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits”. Similar to species, the more biological and scientifically ones are more neutral as perspectivized descriptions. Far from

implying that physical attributes and bio-scientifically evidenced claims are the only reliable definitions, I include these in order to showcase the fundamental matter of contention in reading and analysing fantasy species as races, as has been the case in past academic and casual approaches as well as used by creators of texts.

Orcs as a race among other fantasy races, often human, elf and dwarf, implies that they stem from the same genus, which, as different textual iterations with their narrative origins reveal, they do not (see 3.1.1). In fact, race in human ideology is only derivative of physical attributes but mostly constructed socially 'on top of' physicality – they work in tandem. Race has, unfortunately, due to historical events and even presently reaching attitudes collected a precarious status. The term itself is not negative but the discourse around race and racism as racial discrimination have made it a hypersensitive issue when initiated in discussion. In addition, race, sex/gender and sexuality have become the epitomes of the current politically (hyper)correct culture (PC culture) because they have been re-analysed ad infinitum with varying results of positive acceptance (see e.g. Meynell 800). While racism has the derogative use somewhat exclusively, speciesism, as Jaquet emphasizes, is not immediately and explicitly disparaging, even though it is used rather carelessly in the negative condemnation of species discrimination without consideration of the socially accepted forms of discrimination that the term also includes (448). Because these both involve a vast number of users of the negative connotation, the neutrality of the term speciesism is somewhat compromised. Thus, in using race for fantasy species, the accompanying sensitivity and negative historical connotations are also, possibly unintentionally, initiated in analysis as pre-existing in the text.

Of course, an argument rises as to the human origins of these fantasy species because they are products of human imagination(s). This is not contested here, but the use of real human concepts as directly correspondent to imaginative creatures is. Compare, for example, the definitions' chosen features as classifications: Merriam-Webster's 2a on race involves concepts that

in themselves are ‘fuzzy’ as defined entities (e.g. family), because all of them have been contested as to which characteristics to include in order to fulfil the requirements of a definition. Similarly, 2b includes the wording ‘people’, which automatically designates race as human-centric, and ‘breed’ as synonymous but used in nonhuman cases, which drives towards seeing anything other than human as other and human as normal.

The very form of the definitions is evidence of the highly problematic nature of identifying what a group of characterized individuals are termed to be. They are divided into subcategories in terms of how they have been classified as part of a theoretical school or as predetermined advances into an existing concept: for example, race as physical and social distinction of human subcategories is largely accepted from anthropology and breed as the nonhuman equivalent of this race. Many of the socially constructed characteristics and/or attributes in the biology-derived definitions are omitted precisely because they differ when analysed as a species among a collection of species. Of course, their interests are somewhat different from those of social sciences, which explains the need to limit the features, especially ones so regularly contested, that are taken into consideration. Despite this attempt at neutrality in core terminology, many infuse their reading of a given text with the specific loaded understanding of one subsidiary (race as racial-ethnographic *and* species distinctive) rather than the overlapping set of accord.

It has been suggested that this tendency is due to the base nature of the reading mind being unable to completely detach from the embodied knowledge and worldview of its host, the human, and, therefore, the human-centric interpreting and ensuing reproduction of the textual components in the mind (Hayward 51). As was discussed above, this “inherent anthropocentrism” has been questioned as a universal truth as well as a comprehensively logical and ethical term to use for describing the world (Woodhall 51, Hayward 53), be it fictional or real. Insinuating this would imply the world (i.e. planet Earth, nature, and other world constituents) did not exist without the human

mind to rationalize and idealize it into existence. The world pre-human, and alternatively *post*-human, exists – why not fantasy worlds pre-human as well? As Cary Wolfe advocates, "we must take yet another step, another post-, and realize that the nature of thought itself must change if it is to be posthumanist" (xvi), with posthumanist thought, I argue, relaying nonhumanity as fundamentally possible if difficult to realize. For now, we must contend with post- before there can be a pre-.

This applies to the fantasy genre in general: while being imaginative and constantly reworked by the limits of the imaginable, fantasy is still anchored to the reality humans physically inhabit but is not necessarily limited exclusively to what the human as a species *in* this reality embodies (see C. Wolfe xiv-xv). To illustrate how the issue of *Homo sapiens*-perspectivized reading still persists, especially in regard to fantasy world inhabitants, and why it is counterproductive to the intentions its different approaches attempt to recreate, I will next examine the selected attributes most often referred as problematic in fantasy species, through the case example Orc. I hesitate to use the term characteristic, as it implies either a strong literary – that is, consciously constructed – persona or a subconscious prototypical nature of a given group, which really is just stereotyping, which is why I discuss attributes instead.

3.1.1 Originating the Orc

So far, the Orc has not had extensive ontological or bio-evolutionary exposition. They are simply lumped as horde-like creatures of evil, manipulated and controlled by evil beings, the antagonists of the respective narratives. Very limited explanations are given as to how and when exactly the particular species came to be. Tolkien's orcs are most often perceived as the originating or prototypical of orcs – granted, with ample reason, as he popularized the (high) fantasy genre with his *Lord of The Rings* trilogy (1954-1955) and *The Hobbit* (1937), and with it the accompanying three

classic species, orc, elf, and dwarf. For example, Young positions Tolkien as the originator of the orc (89), but I would perhaps modify this as Tolkien delivering the *modern* orc or, alternatively, Tolkien reimagining the folkloric chaotic image or *idea* of orc, ogre, goblin and other 'monstrous' faerie creatures into a single framed and named force of evil, united under a single theme 'bad'. In fact, even Tolkien used these kin species as interchangeable by describing and naming the goblins as orcs and vice versa in his books. Rather than understanding this as incompetence or accident on the author's part, I suggest seeing it as indecisiveness on the actual subconscious source of origin of the species outside *Lord of the Rings* and reflection of the attitude towards orcs.

Tracing the existence of orcs solely on Tolkien's work gives precedence to author-oriented meaning-making of texts, which by itself without complementary readership is questionable (cf. Stein 455), let alone authoritating an entire species that has since and even before it expanded beyond its textual world to a single text (see Harvey 23, G. Wolfe "Evaporating" 52-53). There are earlier variations of the similar militant creatures resembling orcs in fairy tales and folktales, for example, but they are often confused or simply synonymously irreplaceably used with ogres. For example, the Orc can be etymologically traced to the Greek mythology God of death, Orcus, who, by no means a god of beauty in fashion of his fellow deities, punished the evil in the afterlife. Instead of trying to implement author-related specific meanings from a singular text or, contrarily, implementing contemporary ideologies that overtime could develop in a faster pace in contrast to the text that paces in universal chronology, I suggest reading the species as an experimental exercise of imagination. It *is* fantasy, after all. To add to this, I do not mean that author-related meanings are meaningless as realizing that Tolkien's fantasy world situates in the fifties, which were quite drastically different from today obviously, gives certain light to the implicit decodings of the text in its environment as opposed to one produced sixty years later like *Bright*. What I do remind is that

using theories and social concepts of the time the text is created in will most certainly uncover differing results than those of today retroactively lensed (see Young 100).

Looking at different iterations to the admittedly narrow-scripted origins of orcs, some recurring characteristics can be found: namely that orcs are beings of either natural mutation (e.g. Orsimer of Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* [2011] or Blizzard's *World of Warcraft* [2004-] orcs) or, more often, mutilation (Tolkien's orcs), always by malevolent beings commandeering their original hosts and in the process imposing their will on these mutilated forms. In either case, the true origin of the orcs is left largely unexplained: In the first case, it is a known fact in the respective world, which the reader then needs to accept as a simple state of matter. That is, the reader accepts that how the orcs came to be is not as important as how they are represented now, unless the how of the past becomes relevant to how they deal with certain situations or certain cohabitants of their world, such as elves if they are distant, unmutated relations. As in *Warcraft*'s case, simply accepting that they have lived for several millennia in their own world previous to the manipulation inflicted on them and forceful invasion into the world occupied by humans among other creatures. They are descendants of stone giant, Grond, from which through multiple stage by stage mutations of colossal–magnaron–gronn/ogron–ogre–orc (*WoWpedia*) the orc developed. In the Tolkenian orc case, the actual process of mutilation and continued inbreeding of the species is barely disclosed, either because the process itself is irrelevant to the development of the species moving forward or the inexplicableness is itself a means of creating disconnect between the original species organity as opposed to the unnatural monstrosity it has been distorted into (cf. Garland Thomson 96) . The unknown is more disorienting and fearful – knowing begets understanding, and understanding invites rational action, mental or physical, against the unknown.

This raises the question whether orcs' birth rate is dependent on outside forces – someone mutilating other species to continuously create them – whether the unnatural mutation process has

rendered them infertile, or are the naturally mutated variations of orcs the only ones able to breed and therefore determinable as a species. After all, if the group lacks the capability to successfully pass on its genetic code as the next generation of similar organic built, it no longer qualifies as a species, as was established in 3.1. In this case, it is an expired/expiring variation of a species, so far in multiple narratives a mutilated variation of elves. This reveals that Tolkien's orc, which is commonly recognized as original and prototypical, is not in fact a species at all. Assuming their inbreeding is not the result of developed natural birth process but continued mutilation of elves, neither is it truly a race either. Race would imply a subspecies (of elves) capable of multiplying on its own. In contrast, the orcs in other iterations of the titular species are independent in this regard, and in addition to breeding, pass on their socially performed species codex (i.e. morals, ethics, habits etc.) as well. Curiously, many of these more naturally performing orcs are found in (video) games which, in turn, are the modes most often using the more loaded term race of their respective species, and the mode which currently has been at the brunt of, for example, racial criticism (e.g. Young, Schwartz, and Langer).

Bright follows the partially unknown approach: the film begins with a montage of street images from Los Angeles and its multitude of orc-related spray-paints and street tags. Aside from a few subtext comments and snide remarks of side characters, the origin of the orcs in the film is left entirely to the interpretation of this initial montage. I will look at three still-images to see how *Bright* builds its orc origins primarily through this montage (see Appendices). In figure 1, the caption "In the beginning god created all races equal" is followed by an added "but elves are more equal" beside an orc skull shot in the head and blood spilling. The original artist has created a link between all races ontologically, in this case through a monotheistic god. Whether this original reference was to the capitalized God of Christianity is not discernible because the caption is in all-caps. Nevertheless, this reveals that there has been in-text discourse to species' relations prior to introducing the reader

to the current world climate, and that this discourse has been unsuccessful in establishing a neutral body of framework for the species of the world. That is, they either have a shared god between species and socio-political circumstances have resulted in species-specific unrest in the belief system or their differing religions and morals are in contest with each other to the point of intolerance.

This worldbuilding extends the world historically beyond the immediate text from the start of the film, which means the reader has to establish these historical connections via a limited set of clues and their previous knowledge of similar cases. That is, they access the popular culture memory bank to enrich the implied meaning of elves as "more equal" to god(s) because elves have been their genealogical ancestors in previous narrative iterations and, furthermore, they are considered a highly developed and skilled species in many other narratives. The fact that all races would have been created by a shared god is neither confirmed nor denied: it has become irrelevant as a unifying factor.

What is more important in this small dialogue, is that the social distinction of the two species has escalated, or declined, beyond shared beginnings in the mind of the responder. Interestingly, since the elves of *Bright* live on their own district, this tag is most likely originally created by a human and the answer by an orc. This designs an image of the human as the equality-seeking norm, or the naïve fantasist of their reality, and orcs as the implied bottom class, jealous/bitter lowlives incapable of reaching their potential – or simply realists of elven and, to an extent, human hegemonic supremacy over all other species. I will return to this orc-elf relation in the next two sections as well, as it is a more fruitful relation than that of human, not only though largely, due to their linked origin kinship in other texts. This close intra- and cross-textual relationship between two species, even if often in animosity, is another specific fantasy species quirk that has garnered little attention (cf. vampires and shapeshifters, McMahon-Coleman & Weaver 9-10). Even when such relations are

overabundantly displayed in fiction across media, they remain unnoticed – a symptom of "it is what it is" nonchalance or imposed irrelevance under human-centrism?

This oligarchic-like rule is even further pronounced in the other images of the montage in which the Dark Lord is revealed as an elf. In one, he is pictured as holding a wand with multiple orc skulls behind him, which denotes the agenda of past orcish depictions of rank and file mass for armies of evil. Orcs are expendable to the cause of the Dark Lord, "whose diktats almost inevitably represent an estranging parody of just governance" (Clute & Grant 339), not only as servants but flesh of the environment. As a species they have been imitated as passive portraits of fantasy worlds, tropes without much in-depth content, actionable only as zombie-like hordes of evil to be vanquished (see Young 101). This diminishes the victory of evil to a simple scene of brawn overpowering brawn, which was, and unfortunately to some extent still persists as, the prevalent image created by mass production of low-price (high) fantasy paperbacks. This image, in part, lead to the association of popular culture, of which these texts were part and parcel of, to 'low culture' (see Bru 7, G. Wolfe "Evaporating" 24). Because this connotation has a long and somewhat intermittent history, I will not delve into it further here. Suffice to say, the popular stems from the German *folk*, which quite obviously associates the folk art/tale/entertainment/culture as peoples' art etc. (see e.g. Storey *Cultural Theory*). This invites to consider the larger fantasy genre-culture relations in reading fantasy texts instead of focusing on singular ideas as textually inherent.

Epic battle scenes are reduced by horde-mentality of the opponent as romanticising and glorifying war (Schwartz 322). When the opponent is an extended cord of bodies of one mind, the heroes are left with no moral dilemma of mass killing, even in the name of greater good, let alone possibly annihilating an entire species (Schwartz 322). Although, in cases such as Tolkien, where the mutilations are irreversible and the new forms retain none of the original hosts' characteristics, including the ability to inbreed, eradication of such species variations becomes less of a plight.

However, in many cases the Orc is simply manipulated into this (e.g. *Warcraft*), which rouses the question of responsibility of action under extreme duress or even mind control (Langer 94). In comparison, consider the Imperius curse of J.K Rowling's Potterverse: is the person really responsible when such forces as magical control is at work? Just as the wizards and witches, the orcs (e.g. in *Warcraft*) are often controlled by magical means into fighting for evil and doing deeds that perhaps go against their moralities or gain them nothing personally. In contrast, a *majority* of the orcs in *Bright chose* to join evil. Why is it that individual cases are flexible while an entire species is not given absolution from past manipulation and control?

Suppose the Orc is connotative of the racial/indigenous Other, then this analogy implies that the White self is not in fact Aragorn and the other heroes, but the Saurons and Dark Lords of fantasy texts, who seek supremacy over all races (species) without regard to consequences of completely destroying and manipulating some races in turning against their own and other races, as was the case with, for example, slavery. Of course, while these manipulated races of reality profited from these acts in some way, economically or otherwise, the orcs in many texts gain nothing because they act as the proxy of the antagonist's will. Aragorn et al. are the fabricated and perhaps unreachable fantasy of self and the real self quite something else, but rarely is this role further explored beyond its static role as the (post)colonialising Western White. If Sauron and the orc-horde invading Middle-Earth represent hegemonic cultures, Aragorn et al., or more likely the elves in this imagination, are the previously in now-reality othered racial others, now as the self in the protagonist-hero, fighting back. This is assuming the histories of the now-reality and the logics are the frame or lens we use in reading the text as well as assuming that the physical traits of the character-heroes are less important in identifying selfness. In maintaining the connection of the other as that of Tolkienian horde-orc and not the subtly differing set of imaginations, the critiques are in fact maintaining the very logics they oppose, rather than the texts themselves or creators

advocating such implicitly explicit notions. I acknowledge that simple subversion of roles is not a sufficient method in removing issues like racial logic, but exercises like this are possibly less tedious first steps towards understanding and evolving beyond various logics.

Indeed, another image (see fig. 2) in *Bright*'s montage showcases the mural of the battle against the Dark Lord in which the orc folk hero, Jirak, leads the Nine Armies, consisting of the nine "intelligent" species of the *Bright* world: humans, elves, centaurs, dwarves, brezzik ("Lizardmen"), giants, goblins, panahu, and ogres. According to the *Bright Wiki* the orcs are "not counted among the Nine Races because most of them sided with the Dark Lord", which aptly showcases the fundamental speciesism present in this text, as they are not counted by the other species, and throughout the frame of mind surrounding fantasy, as more than a collection of mistakes (see also 3.2). This prejudice against orcs is conjured in-text through simple images and then continuously connected with the orcs' history cross-textually through the memory bank (cf. Nick's comment in the beginning of 3.1.3), without the use of external sources to explain single commentaries. The fandom simply adds words to the understanding of this attitude. In fact, it is only in the fandom that I found the explanation that the species in *Bright* have, indeed, existed alongside humans in the same reality. The Orcs of *Bright* originate from the Pripet Marshes, in modern day northern Ukraine and southern Belarus and migrated to America in the turn of the 19th century – this is supported by an interview with the language expert, David J. Peterson, contracted for the film's nonhuman languages (see Stuart). The fact that this origin became clear only through the fandom further proves the importance of the transmedial storytelling of fantasy and its tropes.

While these fandom pages are slightly suspect as sources of official information, because they are wikis collected by fan editors with scarce source tags and not the original creators of the texts, they still offer a beneficial outtake on the texts' expanded world. These fandoms and wikis are a very visual generation of the popular culture memory bank, because it collects information

from the texts themselves as well as outside sources, such as interviews and articles, and are open for the debate of what is included as canon. They are expansive transmedial story-worlds for "those individuals who enjoy searching out disparate narrative elements across multiple media platforms" (Harvey 14). Simply put, they are as integral in the processes of popular culture developments and discourse as the texts themselves. They are resourceful as material for further study on the effect and contribution of fans on the overall understanding of the world and narrative of a given text. This constant back and forth process is elemental in fantasy fiction in particular because it contains many such tropes as species negotiated largely inter-textually rather than intra-textually, which is why when there are inconsistent and fragmented uses of the collective memory in one text, such as in *Bright* (see also chapter 5), or in critiquing an entire species, the process hits disconnect and with disconnect comes discontent.

To illustrate this discontent further, in one of the montage's images (see fig. 3), the orcs are portrayed by major human periodical wars with the tag "Orcs fight for you… who fights for us?", suggesting that orcs and other species have been present in the world of *Bright* all along and, further, that they have participated in the historical milestones of the now-reality with their reality resulting largely as that of the now-present. It is an alternate present which orcs have participated in without making much of an impact overall, which not only seems unlikely, but also displays the role of fantasy species as world ingredients, object but not subject. I concede that in this particular image, the Western viewpoint is strongly represented as that which matter, because the war outfits relay the major wars United States of America has been part of as the orcs are geared by American military outfits. Even though it is useful to note that since this film is situated in Los Angeles, a nationalistic flavour is understandable, but the orcs are presented as inhabitants of the *world*, not only USA, which would create an assumption of them being involved in wars of the world other than these portrayed, or not caring of human conflicts at all (see also Mendlesohn 90). It is precisely these

types of easy anthropomorfications and reflections of existing phenomena that reveal the present misconduct in using and discussing fantasy species, and why further discourse of the role of species in fantasy is needed.

The drastic neglect of Jirak's importance in the victory over the Dark Lord may be an oversight by the film's writer and/or director, as the other races have such extreme prejudice as to overlook the leader of their world-saving rebellion and his entire species for the two thousand years following. This oversight itself can be seen as a common behavioural course in dealing with fantasy species without their larger context as a transmedial popular culture participant. The film uses the memory bank to create a sense of continued verse-history, even adds its own reversive take of the orc as the uniting hero to the rest, but reverts its orcs back to passive fantasy landmark status by forgetting its own inner history narrative, namely Jirak's importance. Rather than connoting this as simply postcolonial or social class commentary, I suggest seeing this as failure to grasp the significance of fantasy species as active independent social groups in and out of their texts. They are not only convenient clues or promotive markers of the fantastical, but actual members of their respective worlds, regardless of *possible* implicit indicators. I realize these fantasy species in *Bright* are given a fabricated history and the species itself is a fantasy inside a fantasy seemingly acting as independent groups, but as will become evident through the other attributes and the following chapters, this is an illusion because these species are constantly weighed down by associated human-centrism and anthropocentric reflection similar to the previous.

3.1.2 Ontological and Spiritual Glances

Many critics, both academic and otherwise, seem to 'forget' that in applying socio-cultural concepts in their analyses of orcs, they are operating on the base assumption that orcs are a reflection of the human species and all its accompanying societal and social concepts, namely racial and ethnic

disparities. For example, Young argues that "there is no resemblance, specific or general, between orc religion and Islam or any other major world religion, but discourses which Other racialized religion and its proximity as a threat to 'civilization' resonate between the real world and Fantasy" (103). If orcs are 'originally' elves, should they not preliminarily be examined as a variation of them, not humans? Elves are commonly associated with a strong connection to nature and environmental critique (cf. werewolves' paradoxical unnaturalness in body and naturalness in spirituality, McMahon-Coleman & Weaver 169, 178), as well as their status as a socially and intellectually highly developed species. Looking at any text involving elves, really, their equipment, spiritualists, mages and infrastructure are valued as top tier. This is perhaps best envisioned in games as simply being elven made makes, for example, items or weapons fundamentally more powerful, durable, (magically) resistant, and often requires higher levels of XP (experience) to be equipped. Thus, in order to perform elven artefacts and rituals, one needs to be superhuman – supernaturally proficient (cf. Young "supernatural identity as inescapable" 144). This makes the variations of orcs as mutilated elves a more relative "fallen from grace" analogy of elves instead of the prevalent social class distinction, industrialization, postcolonial or racial frames of interpretive readings used in analysing the undercurrents of orcish texts. If elves are the iteration of idealized natural connection, then Tolkenian mutilated orc-elves are the epitome of the idea of disconnect between society and nature as well as lack of development due to being indentured to evil. Despite the disconnect in development, the Orc is still superhuman in its natural abilities and, therefore, not inferior to humans.

Recent variations of orcs have returned the Orc to nature by connecting their belief system in naturalistic deities and spiritualism (e.g. *Warcraft*), and they even lead 'simpler' lives of tribal societies as physically and mentally closer to their environment, or as Young terms, these naturalistic orcs are "in keeping with contemporary environmentalist thought which sees it [nature]

as something to be protected, and orcs as its custodians" (98). While Young sees a connection to indigenous peoples, I see the orcs regaining a modicum of their elven-kin sensitivity to nature, adapted with their own habits of in-between war mentality and war as a predominant, preoccupying way of life. It could be argued that they re-seek the connection to nature to reconnect with their past and, in living closer to nature's quiet that is somewhat binary to thematics of war, they are able to deal with their post- and pre-war anxieties – the orc is dealing with PTSD, as it were.

A connection to paganism, occult, naturalism, spiritualism et cetera. is not immediately derivative of indigenous peoples or "sinister" beliefs of the now-reality (Langer 94), but can and, I propose should be, viewed as non-religious until clearly stated as elsewise. In fact, paganism has historically existed within the modern conceptualization of the West, these factions were simply not as numerously popular and received an occultist association by actions of othering (see Kirby 93). As applied by Hanegraaff, "spirituality [is] any human practice which maintains contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning by way of the individual manipulation of symbolic systems" (296), while religion is largely the same but, instead, emphasizes the symbolic system's influence on the actions as ritualistically maintaining contact between the everyday and higher forms of meaning (Hanegraaff 295). Making a connection in spiritualism of a species and consequently to native peoples relies on the assumption that theological (i.e. religious) beliefs are the norm to which others are othered as somehow 'deformative' – de-normative, really (Kirby 11, 40). In other words, by assuming spirituality together with tribal culture as connotative of Natives, of which there are many different kinds, the act of reading is pre-posited as from a Western point of view, and not the text itself implying such a reading.

The previous conceptual themes 'elf as desirable connect' and 'orc as disconnect' sound appealing because elements of them are quite easily found in different duplications of the phenomenon precisely by assigning an entire species to represent each end of the binary scale.

However, the issue lies in the fact that, despite its appeal, this *reading* is constructed on the mirroring act of embodying current *human* ethical and environmental crisis into particular species (see Turner & Donnelly 388), as well as historical images of Western and indigenous as opposites. By framing the two species as representatives of desirability or undesirability of nature and spiritual connection, humans are centred, if not as the status quo, then, at the very least, the foremost evaluative authority in the desirability of the scale bounds.

The species themselves become somewhat redundant, as assigning another species to represent the various trending human anxieties can be addressed through any and all of them by restructuring them in terms of human ideology and (current) way of life. Of course, this would require multiple reiterations before a particular species would be considered as representative of select attributes. This is precisely why constantly criticizing the Orc as a racially charged species, for example, upholds the very status of White as norm that is argued against, simply because the Orc is casually seen as applicable to human character frames. This devalues the role of the species *in* its narrative world, devaluing the narrative world itself as less (racially aware, sexually proactive, etc.), and, further, undermines the genre as naïve and sloppy at best, incompetent at worst.

This reconciliation to nature can be seen as the post-cultural mind desiring back to nature and naturality as opposed to the constructed urban world they inhabit (Turner & Donnelly 389), but I argue that this empowers the human normativity brought on by anthropocentric worldview and social sciences in analysing speculative fiction. Instead, I propose the orc to be examined as part and parcel of its respective world first, as an integral trope in its own genre second, and these findings, then, whenever necessary, cross-examined with whatever theoretical frame is relevant in connection, without dismissing but constantly parallelizing the previous two.

Few of the texts involving orcs introduce any religious or theological belief systems to them, which is understandable as their origin is left to individual textual interpretation. Again, games are

somewhat exceptional in this. For example, *Dungeons & Dragons* describe their orcs as having their own deities, predominantly, Gruumsh, the one-eyed god of conquest and savage subjugation of orcs over other species, and *Warcraft* includes a more organic belief system sans deities and instead has the "orc shamans draw their power from the spirits of nature, forming an intimate connection with the very world that surrounds them". The *World of Warcraft* wiki site continues to describe that the orcs of *Warcraft* progress to realize by extrospection to other species that they are, in fact, more in harmony with the world than their fellow species. While brief, the wiki site does include a specific section for 'faith', which is far more than most literary productions of orcs have indicated in their worldbuilding. For example, Young criticizes this more or less as a "solid effort" but inefficient in its slow and scarce build-up as to redeem the species' primitivity and immaturity because they are racialized by *other* characteristics (103). This, again, reinforces the very idea that is argued against, because the Orc is assumed, by human associative characteristics, to be racially charged as a species in any text by a seemingly overabundant number of indicators. In contrast, once the Orc has spiritual narrative elements, they are 'not enough' to indicate an alterity or change to the norm of them as a mindless horde (Young 103). I argue that it as an on-going progress at its adolescence, which makes it no less effective indicator but instead a flag for evolving intent (see also chapter 4).

In both games, the orcs' belief systems model the structures of tribal cultures of their own world, not necessarily historically connected to the now-reality, and pagan ideas, not unusual in other fantasy species, such as werewolves, either. This has been questioned as derogatory to human Native peoples to whom they are connected via these and other attributes like closeness to nature, as Natives are in this connection essentially associated with brutes and primitive, that is uncivilized and/or underdeveloped, societies (Young 97). Questions of race – race as category of humankind – have also been applied to showcase the inherent and desirable norm of Whiteness and Western culture and with it the dominant Christian beliefs, if not the religious symbolic framework, by the

contrasting humans of these texts. The orcs' beliefs, after all, reinforce their position as sentient and morally advanced, to a smaller degree in some cases such as in *D&D*, but not in terms of how the dominant cultures of the now-reality see as civilized (see Langer 94). Arguing, however, that the entirety of the species in the text, let alone transmedially in the genre-culture, is fundamentally degrading because of associations to concepts in the now-reality, is a simplification born of repetitive interpretations by the standards of humans.

Looking at *Bright*, there seems to be no strict theological disclosure to explain the orcs' way of life in urban Los Angeles – that is, they follow no religious dogmas as their explanatory moralities. The single clearly referenced socio-cultural rite of passage "blooding", "an act of great bravery" as described by Nick, is directly linked to the social hierarchy of the orcs rather than existential explanations. Later, when Nick is shot and killed, Tikka brings him back to life with the magic wand that started their figurative journey. The shaman or spiritual representative then claims that "this is a prophecy, for he [Nick] has risen", which the orcs see as the prophecy of Jirak, reborn as Nick, another unblooded orc, once again rising to defeat the eventual return of the Dark Lord. The orcs surrounding the interrogation of the three, all kneel before the reincarnated Jirak.

It would be easy to see this as analogous to the Christian resurrection of Christ, which would mean that the orcs of *Bright* followed religious forms rather than pagan or spiritual forms of belief. In addition, in this analogy, the orcs are associated with the Western dominant form of deity-worship, not Native peoples. By reading the orcs through such an analogy, I am (1) positioning them in lines of concepts from the now-reality rather than, for example, as living beings in their respective genre-worlds, and (2) assuming any resurrection-related narrative element is immediately associative of the most prominent theological sect who 'popularized' the resurrection image (Christianity) simply because this scene shows levels of spiritual discourse. In fact, the film references its inner mythical prophecy at odd occasions to remind that the textual narrative follows

a fantasy trope under the buddy-cop thematic. The film also simultaneously downplays these spiritual connections by making light of the prophetic mentions, such as Ward's answer to Nick's inquiry of them being in a prophecy after Nick's resurrection: "We're not in a prophecy, all right? We're in a stolen Toyota Corolla."

Perhaps, instead, the prophetic connection follows the traditional fantasy trope and popular culture mythos of prophetic dualities of 'good' and 'evil' always being connected, being constantly reborn in texts to re-negotiate and re-establish balance (Thomas 60-61) – consider, for example, Harry and Voldemort, Darth Vader and Luke, Professor X and Magneto and so on. Their connection is as much an extension of the inner psyche's moral struggles, individual or collective, as it is of externally enclosing anxieties (Robinson 34). As Nilsen and Donnelly argue, "fantasy allows us—or even forces us—to become greater than we are, greater than we could hope to be. It confronts us with the major ambiguities and dualities of life—good and evil, light and dark, innocence and guilt, reality and appearance . . . and cowardice and heroism" (210). Despite arguing from the specific interests of children's fantasy fiction, this also applies to adult speculative fiction. The *continuing* association of certain groups (e.g. orcs), instead of 'corrupt' individuals, whatever corrupt in any case is, to some (im)moral attributive behaviour and attituded models is what maintains the various implicit logics (see also Robinson 30). By continuing association I do not emphasize texts but rather the people behind textual imaginations and re-imaginations, the implicators of logics *to* texts.

In a very brief image during the scene in which Nick and Ward are captured by Fogteeth orc gang members and brought to their leader in a basement structure decorated as a seemingly ritualistic place, a shaman of sorts is shown just before Nick is shot. He is dressed in red cloth and wears a decorative animal skull with horns, strongly implying a satanistic evil-worshipping of the past orc underbelly life of serving evil entities. The surrounding room is filled with candles and walls, what I suspect, decorated with pictorials of past orc life, all circling a deep chasm in the ground,

indicating that the orcs do have a spiritual sect of largely unknown nature that might have to do with their connection to deep earth – again, implying a larger transmedial 'ontological' orc-kinship to nature. In doing so, the film seemingly continues the formerly analysed naturalistic reconciliation in-progress, primarily provided by games. Although, this case, I argue, is more in due to the urban fantasy scape of the film than an underlying attempt at returning the orc to a more negatively primitive connotation. The orc has been part of the recurring trope set of species in high fantasy which involves a world-set of abundant nature and pseudo-medieval life. In essence, the orc is necessarily more physically in connection to natural surroundings and more easily avoids contact with other species and their influence than it is capable of doing in an urban setting only punctuated with fantasy elements and defined mostly by the human societal presuppositions, the human way of life.

If, for example, the orcs of *Warcraft* were plucked from their world and set into the same modern LA city, undoubtedly their beliefs and shamanic rituality would hit a very real existential crisis simply because there is essentially no natural nature, the physical embodiment of their spirituality, to connect with in this urban setting. Not to mention they would need to adapt to the societal reordering of species with humans at a clear advantage over other species, excluding elves. This scenario is the reality in *Bright*, as the orcs are thrown into the world that is already close to capacity in constructed worldviews, including views about orcs. Also partially unknown is whether the species of *Bright* have existed alongside humans all along and at the time of migrating and/or assimilating to human societies simply developed much on the same social class distinctions as their fictional counterparts (elves as high society, orcs as primitive). This seems likely but, again, human-centric as the world of *Bright* is more or less identical in its daily life structure to the one humans dominate in the now-reality. If fantasy species have coexisted for so long, over two thousand years by account of the defeat of the Dark One, surely the impact of other species would be even more

fundamental in society than presented, especially considering it was an orc that united the “Nine Armies” that defeated the evil being subjecting all the species so long ago (cf. fig. 2 and 3.1.1).

This is where genre conventions become highly relevant and instructional: Urban fantasy often includes an unexpected event that causes a major realignment of parallel worlds. These two worlds, usually the now-reality and the imaginary, intertwine either partially (e.g. fantasy species are implemented into the now-reality) or more extensively by including multiple tropes into the now-reality. Many of these change the natural laws (e.g. magic) and/or the order of the current world without drastically changing the prevalent understandings of these orders (Mendlesohn 114-115). Readers familiar with the (urban) fantasy tropes are, then perhaps, more forgiving to the lack of rationalizations in the film whereas those unfamiliar lack the same necessary cognitive tools to fill the narrative bypasses. Therefore, they can be frustrated, as is shown in the either-or enjoyable reception of the film (cf. 4.1). I will return to this more genre-specific meaning-making in chapters 4 and 5.

3.1.3 Hierarchical Structuring

During the first call the two protagonists receive, Nick’s comment that “everywhere I go, why have orcs always gotta be the bad guys?” to which the sheriff, Rodriguez, replies rather racially poignantly, “Hey, don't look at me, man. Mexicans still get shit for the fuckin' Alamo”, makes light of the very dire segregated circumstances of orcs in a world shared by other typical fantasy species. The script of the movie makes a clear thematic connection to the ongoing racial discussion, whether intentionally or not is not as relevant as the fact that such metalevel remarks are so casually thrown in. These casualities imply a general attitude towards assigning blame or endorsement to individuals as representatives of entire groups by simply being characteristically, or in easily interpretable attributes, as part of the history of the group. Worded like this, it can be applied to any attributes

other than race, for example, which is not an accident. The orcs of *Bright* "chose the wrong side a long time ago and have been paying for it ever since" as described by Nick at the service station, which is reminiscent of the species in other fantasy texts as the scapegoat evil beings (see also chapter 4). They have been treated as vessels and dispensable foot soldiers of armies, essentially as dummy bodies of epic battle scenes, and ascribed as dumb or easily manipulated, judging by their history of being manipulated into or otherwise forced to serve evil beings.

Little attention is given to the fact that they are, in most iterations other than *Bright*, denied a real choice as to the events leading to their subjected status. They have been assigned as part of bestiaries, beastfolk, monster literacies et cetera, always with a presumption that they are beasts and monsters as per Tolkenian horde-orc image – beings without sentiment. While Kirby's term "Otherkin" (39) initially tastes of neutral applicability, it does imply the Othering of nonhumans and enforces human normity. Alternatively, this can be thought as the Othering of the now-reality. Rather than focusing on the possible implied positions of human-centrism, the species are other to the ones found actually inhabiting the other (to them) reality – namely that there are no species like them, which makes them other to what is known by them, not other than what *is* to humans.

Fantasy has since the vessel-stage, most prominent in Tolkien's time and the period's literature, complexified its own inner bestiary subject matter. As Kirby argues,

> Where earlier narratives tended to posit a fairly clear division between good and evil, human and other, or benign and monstrous, recent texts are rather tending towards a position that emphasizes plurality and relativism. -- Thus, the werewolves, vampires and dragons and all have moved away from their traditional location as the enemies of humanity – those senseless beasts bent on the destruction of humanity – and have generally become more complex, multifaceted, and self-conscious persons in their own right. (100)

Evil is no longer a lawful set of attributes but a continuum. In addition, evil is not an inherent attribute of single species (cf. Langer 102). To illustrate this evil nature's growing complexity further, I borrow a rather apt quote from Geralt of Rivia, a monster hunter and categorized as nonhuman

no less, “Evil is Evil. -- Lesser, greater, middling, it's all the same. Proportions are negotiated, boundaries blurred. I'm not a pious hermit, I haven't done only good in my life. But if I'm to choose between one evil and another, then I prefer not to choose at all” (Sapkowski 90-91). Unfortunately, just as Geralt, the orcs were denied the choice of not doing anything at all, and despite their victimized origin, their atrocities are the defining attribute in continued prejudice. Humans are the ‘lesser evil’ left standing, after the greater fantasy evil of each subjugator has been vanquished. Although, it could be argued on the basis of the criticism by this thesis alone that fantasy evil overlords and humans have the same tendency to enforce their own worldviews upon these imaginative creatures – one is simply using seemingly sound logic and cognitive mimicry while the other follows a more traditional fantasy route: magic.

Orcs in post-Tolkien renditions have had to reorganize their social hierarchies as suitable to them, which in nearly all of them is a form of coexisting tribal cultures. When evil lords and beings no longer dictate their actions, let alone social structures, the orcs are comfortable with closely resembling formations to armies they have occupied their entire existence around while under the influence of evil and/or tribes of their pre-servitude past. For some variations of orcs, such as those in *Warcraft*, this tribal living was completely natural and was simply put ‘on hold’ for the duration of the time of indentured servitude and returning to it is returning to their natural habitat, in both senses. While these tribes include inner struggles of dominance and some disagreement in moral ethics, which often but not always leads to violence, they constitute a hierarchy that the modern human views as primitive, underprivileged, but orcs themselves see as natural and organic, and human, elven, dwarven et cetera pretention of ‘civility’ as the farce. The valuable distinction in this is that this naturality is not solely in terms of in-opposition to the cultivated and seemingly refined culture of humans, but to inherent feelings of orcs to their world (see spirituality in 3.1.2). An argument could be made that in favouring the Darwinian survival of the fittest, the orcs are

connected with animalistic 'wild' behaviour and through this they are, yet again, portrayed as primitive and 'less intelligent' – a simple deviation from humans (Young 89). Instead, I see this as an alternative worldview supported by the othering *by* the orcs *to* humans, not othering of humanity by humans.

Concerning the case example, *Bright* involves a similar tribal affinity in the form of clans which are then heavily ensembled as gangs of LA, which involves a myriad of possible conceptual problems, not least of which that the orcs are simply stuffed into an existing problematic human structure that itself carries heavy negative connotations without adding a species with a rather misrepresented and similar but not synonymous frame into the mix. Many human gang members deal with issues such as racial profiling, socio-economic background discrimination and prejudice simultaneously (Vigil "Looking", 18-19). Vigil terms the collection of affecting forces of these as "multiple marginality" that eventually lead to gang culture emergence ("Introduction" 7). As is, this seems appropriately analogous to orcs of fantasy but, in connecting the two, both are drastically overburdened with each other's existing associations on top of their own. This, in turn, leads to an even more negative dissociation and possible lack of empathy in interpretation. In addition, orcish tribality is 'natural' while gang culture is a response to a broken societal system.

The *Bright* clan structure is not extensively delved into, which leaves the connotative gang image as the primary cue in how the fractured input is to be fulfilled by the reader. Because the reader, then, has existing ideas of gang behaviour and its highly racialized representation, especially in fiction, they quite easily revert to thinking the Orc in terms of these human-centric mental images and associations solely. In common knowledge, gangs are connected to violence, organized crime, gang-privilege of we-mentality and territoriality (Phillips 126). Looking at the clans of *Bright*, these characteristics remain more or less the same with orcs being short-tempered, collected as clans that are in constant dispute with each other and disdain the society and the police in particular (see Vigil

"Introduction" 12-13), and defend their land and territories with extreme prejudice. These are further reinforced by the initial montage imagery of unnecessary police brutality against orcs, which is a direct comment on the discourse of human (racial) gangs receiving similar treatment simply by association to gang culture (see e.g. Phillips 118, Holmes & Smith 17).

This exposition is where the film's criticism flourishes, with reason: by overtly designating the in-text social commentary based on existing and current realities into single species, the boundaries are no longer negotiated. They are set, even though narrative dialogue clues are made as to reopen the discussion of the properness of such clear distinction. Social class discourse and the reality in which it is born are deeply rooted in human historical developments (see also 4.1), which makes the alternate reality of *Bright* already pseudo-real. It is only partially cognisant to the possible effects of adding nine other species to the already human experienced history. At least, the present of the depicted world does not expressly contradict any of the now-reality's events (cf. the "Alamo comment" in the beginning). In other words, the fantasy elements, namely species, only breach the present world and adopt existing human societal roles or the closest resemblance to them, despite having coexisted with other nonhuman species in this proclaimed alternate world.

Instead of repeating the ramifications of using tribal culture as synonymous to primitivity and margin groups already discussed in the previous section, only this time in relation to gangs, I highlight the depiction of the three most prominent species in *Bright* that reiterate the human-centrism as the norm. As indicated earlier, elves have accumulated both transmedially and cross-textually an image of high society status (see 3.1.2 beginning), with *Bright* taking this status as very literal in its presentation of the species. For example, the elves have physically isolated their habitational and recreational districts from the rest of society to be used as species exclusively. They are pictured as socially, economically and judicially elevated by making their clothes expensive, colourful and all of them wearing sunglasses, indicative of the paparazzi disguise favoured by

celebrities. They also occupy higher occupational positions than orcs, such as “the Magic Task Force” in FBI. Humans are ‘as they are’ in the now-reality – various in their lifestyles and positions in the world. Orcs, in contrast, live in poor districts and slums, dress in gang-affiliated clothes, such as big gangsta-hoodies and jewelry, arrange “block parties” (cf. now-reality’s “ditching parties”, Vigil “Introduction” 12) to celebrate their clan-affiliation and are shown to have low-income jobs like commute and sanitation.

In fact, in seeing Nick in police uniform at arriving to the police station before Nick and Ward first set out on the job, the elven FBI agent, Kandomere, states quietly “an Orc with a badge… unbelievable”, to which his human partner replies, “yeah, that’s something you don’t see every day… like an Elf with a mop”. This creates a clear vertical incline of social place according to species, not only as rendered to the reader through imagery but in the attitudes of the in-text species as how the world simply is and has always been – even outside the text. As Vigil states, “it is when social forces and influences do not function as they should that street subcultures arise to fill the void” (20), with subcultures in the case of orcs as often visualized by tribal affinity, or gang-like clans as in *Bright*.

The pyramid effect of orcs at the bottom, humans in the middle and elves at the top is further illustrated in the montage by various images in which the elves are the dominant species. For example, during the montage (see fig. 4), an elf is graffitied as sitting on a throne-like posh chair holding a human marionette who, in turn, holds a smaller orc marionette. In another, an elf is literally holding a tiny human up over an orc splayed on the ground with the caption “They hold you up to keep us [the orcs] down”. By placing the human as the interagent, the role of that species becomes central as the mediator of the other species – not only as the broker in interspecies relations but as the mediator between the species and the reader. In doing so, the narrative is filtered as anthropocentric despite its attempts at displaying nonhuman points of view, primarily

through Nick. The film does, in imagery and certain actions, contradict this negotiator role to that of the marionette image: for example, in using racially-charged "blue humor" (Pérez & Ward 1811) in placing a "kick me" paper on Jakoby's back or, more drastically, the Internal Affairs officers pressuring Ward into lying about his shooting to implement Jakoby as incompetent in order to get him out of the force. By focusing on the moral dilemmas that Ward faces and his revealed status as a Bright, a capability to use magical wands without harm to self, the interspecies relations become more trivial in comparison to the character development of one human individual.

Despite the film's eventual human-centrism, even with efforts to contrary such as giving one orc a more individual focus, it provides an important discussion that is often neglected: interspecies relationships 'de-human', especially that of orc and elf. As I established above, the Orc has had a close relationship with elves simply because they have been inhabiting the same fantasy worlds for as long as the fantasy genre has existed. Since Tolkien's contribution to this relationship [orcs as mutilated elves], it has developed more species-individually (e.g. *Warcraft* and *D&D*). However, largely thanks to the enduring historic and human-racial connection implemented from outside, they continue to construct self-meaning by contrasting to humans above each other.

In comparison, consider the texts in which the elf species is not the societal high class, such as in Bioware's *Dragon Age* series (2009-2014), in which they are either the nomadic woodland societies with limited contact to humans and other social species or the poor living in slums termed quite markedly as "Kirkwall/Denerim Alienage". Not only is the higher social margin, affirmed in a multitude of texts, declined to the other end of the societal spectrum, with humans always at the middle, but the game series has no orcs as a species, let alone as societal creatures. The game series does include a species, the Qunari, that have many of the similar traits, both physical and cultural, which resemble the Orc in other texts. By not representing the species with the titular

Orc name, the game world gains some leeway in depicting the Qunari, because the popular culture memory frame is not as prominent in the decoding process of the species culturality. It is constructed as synchronically to other species rather than as a reconstruction and potential reimagination of existing ideas of Orcism. Similarly, in the *Witcher*-verse, the elves no longer hold the prominent place among its human peers, excluding historically imbued magical knowledge and artefacts, and are more of a relic species than an active one. With no other species, namely orcs or species similar to Orc-kin, to occupy the lower end of the pyramid, the elves are forced to take the slot. This implies not only human-centrism at the expense of other species, but, more interestingly, a sense of interspecies co-dependency between orcs and elves (cf. Haraway 103) that would exist even without the human as one of the world-accompanying species.

3.1.4 Physicality

Orcs have received criticism for their physical attributes as denoting strong racial connotations. Young divulges that "the visual coding of orcs with skin colour in human ranges -- is potentially confronting and uncomfortable to audiences; making orcs green avoids the appearance of directly referencing real-world peoples without removing the underlying logic of difference" (94), with the underlying logic being that orcs, to the time of her writing, have not been able to escape the inherent racialization of their species in connection to the now-reality, despite cosmetic and slight in-text social changes. In this, I agree – not because of inherent logics, but because applying these logics as logics persist in a genre that is not just a mirror-reality to ours with a cosmetic change.

Young presents the often used "dehumanizing" strategy of animalistic metaphors and descriptions as suggestive of colonial tools of assertion of White civilization as norm (95). In terms of race, there are admittedly remnants of this even in today's texts, but this linguistic play of "dehumanization" is also close to the overall method, estrangement, of speculative fiction and

ecoliteracy. Estrangement, also sometimes interchanged with defamiliarization, uses structural and formal linguistic and semantic structures to create a sense of unfamiliar to the everyday. In essence, they are stylistic plays on words and imagery, rather than rigid laws of association. As Evans describes,

> [T]erms such as "Anthropocene" produce estrangement by positing the hegemonic and imperialist history of western modernity as *itself* a fabulation (and a dangerous and inaccurate one at that). Climate change periodization does not depict an other and unfamiliar world; it depicts our own world as something other than what we had thought it was. It depicts the strangeness of the stories that modernity has told (about) itself, estranging us from where we thought we lived by announcing our actual location in an unfamiliar world - "the Anthropocene". (485)

While Evan's interests lie in climate storytelling and science fiction, the close kin-ship of scifi and fantasy is illustrative to both in their core estrangement strategies (see Harvey 15). By my thesis, I urge a similar introspective recognition of the 'fabulatedness' of concepts used in analysing fantasy. For example, even if a species is given a linguistic description that has, in the past, had negative connotations, any future attempts at reformation are not a lost cause (compare e.g. 'queer'). While some individuals persist in using these negative meanings, it hardly condemns the group the individual identifies themselves with.

Thus, by assigning the Orc with skin colours of black, grey and brown, it was initially criticized as unflattering in their denotation to Black people (Langer 90). With the emergence and continued use of green as their manifested distinction, they are more defamiliarized to what is perceptually experienced in the now-reality – there are few green-skinned beings, human or animal, in the physical now-reality, other than perhaps reptiles, but are not plants living beings as well? It is more to do with deconstructing everyday images of accustom, rather than explicit correlation to the most typical semantic conclusion invited by a (string of) word(s). I would also add that by using green skin, the orcs are reaffirmed as the 'natural' participants of their world by

way of defamiliarizing the 'naturality' of green skin to a world of bipedals in shades of brown and beige.

Then again, *Bright* uses this old adage of orcs being described in porcine features, such as mottled pink and bluish-grey skin, lack of hair and hog-like prominent lower canines. In fact, in figure 1, the skull of an orc is juxtaposed with a tag "pig skin" in the pronounced colours of pigs' skin (pink and greenish-grey) as well as a pigtail and canines. The film deliberately uses intertextually outdated references to simultaneously reaffirm in-text social commentary as well as distance the colonial reading by making it abundantly overt in its associations. Indeed, estrangement is not the exchange of one reality to another but the dialogue between multiple fabricated realities and the one the reader inhabits (Donnelly & Turner 400). In using the problematic porcine ideas, the film attempts to reveal the complete artifice of describing and portraying a species in a world that is only partially recognizable as the one surrounding the reader. However, it becomes tangled in the popular culture memory bank that has designated the use of such attributes as too problematic to be casually used, at least without the reception of the text in its entirety being compromised as 'tainted' by previously loaded imagery, mainly concerning race/ethnicity. In fact, this conglomerate of green, pig, clan and warrior is also seen in the *Star Wars* universe with the Gamorrean, which might indicate a more transmedial hail between sister genres than a historical real association.

Other physical attributes, such as strong build and the usually accompanying stereotypical characteristic of (prone to) violence, have been in certain renditions of the Orc adapted to more ritualistic and gladiatory notions of the proud warrior (see also 3.1.2). This has, in turn, been criticized of being only a moderate improvement or a downright illusory deception of presenting the postcolonial "noble savage" (Young 98, cf. McMahon-Coleman & Weaver 93). If, however, the orcs' history as a transmedial species, fictional as it is, is taken into account, the species has

nuanced since its conception. Instead of solely fixating on the histories of what has remained of real, I suggest examining the subtleties that have made a change for the overall image of the species, both in relation to its previous realizations as well as to the genre-specific markedness of fantasy species. While representations of singular texts may deviate drastically from the common conception of the Orc, the overall sense is slower to transition so fundamentally. *Warcraft*, for example, has been around since 2004, which in the game industry with its leapfrogging progress is practically ancient. For sixteen years, the game content has expanded, which is seen in the volume of the fandom site alone, although the content is also slow to have emerged during these years compared to new fantasy game instalments that include a heavier pre-launch lore. Development does not happen overnight, not in shared fiction or in real life, which is why hanging oneself on the premise of charged readings of attributes eventually do more harm than good. It is not solely in how they are presented but in how readers read them that such logics emerge.

In the case of orcs as violent and mutilated super-bodies, the plain truth of orcs being superhuman, such as having strong senses like smell or marked physical strength, can be accepted as an estrangement strategy of the Orc from the human, not the other way around as it is often perceived (see e.g. Young 144). Consider, for example, the scene in *Bright* in which Nick explains (under duress of Ward's pointed gun) why he allegedly let the orc that shot Ward get away: Nick had lost the culprit in the crowd and cornered an orc in an alley that he mistakes as the shooter. Realizing he was the wrong orc, and with "the troops coming, jacked-up humans with guns looking for an Orc who'd shot a cop", Nick lets the young orc get away because otherwise the extremely prejudiced cops would have shot him immediately. Ward then questions how Nick, without seeing the alley orc's face, knew he had the wrong orc, to which Nick replies, "He's fucking smell. Years of evolution haven't taken away our sense of smell, and he smelled different. What human jury

would believe me?". Ward makes slight of this by asking if the orc had Axe body spray, to which Nick, annoyed, answers, "Yeah, see, this is what I have to fucking deal with!".

This scene neatly conveys that (1) orcs are superhuman at least in heightened senses, (2) orcs' superhuman status is somehow forgotten or sidelined because of their humanoid build and partially assimilated cultural behaviour, while (3) at the same time they are distanced as nonhuman and unequal because they are (physically) different. This paradoxical nature of simultaneously embodying and defamiliarizing orcs by human standards, as I see it, is a more fruitful approach to Orcism as a topic for study rather than applying a rationale of a species being implicitly a fixed personification of something found in human societies.

3.1.5 Gender

Orcs as sexualized beings are far more rarely used let alone analysed as opposed to other fantasy species such as vampires, werewolves and elves. The common assumption is that orcs are hypermasculine creatures embodying primitive male fantasies of patriarchal society (Young 95-96). They have little to no representation of female orcs, and in depicting them, they are often presented as the ideals of patriarchy, pre-feminism, or promiscuous. For example, the orc lesser deity, Luthic or Cave Mother, in *D&D* is described as the deity of fertility, medicine, females and servitude with even her symbolic features, the sprit animal of cave bear and rune, both connotating 'home'. Her status of lesser deity to her greater deity husband, Gruumsh, embellishes the submissiveness of female orcs. Unrestrictive of mode, Stan Nicholls' *Orcs: First Blood* 1999-2000 trilogy depicts the narrative from the point of view of a band of orcs, the enslaved army of evil Queen, Jennesta, who in simple terms uses sex to absorb life-force from her partners to advance her plans of domination. The series involves a single female orc, Coilla, whose sole gender

existence is not, however, enclosed. Giving no backstory to the previous and repetitively using sex as a means to end by a female (Jennesta) is, perhaps needless to say, risky and regressive.

In contrast, in *Warcraft*, "there is no discrimination between genders in orcish society. Women are able to pursue the same career choices as men, rise to positions of power and are even expected to answer to the call for battle just as men are" because "strength (both physical and mental), courage, initiative and independence are prized traits in all orcs" (*WoW Wiki*), conveying, at least in general description, that *Warcraft* seeks to exorcise the patriarchal association. By looking at some examples of the customizations of *Warcraft*'s orcs, there are elements of concurring 'de-feminization' (e.g. punk-rock styled hairdos, multiple unusual piercings and highly muscularized body build) and simultaneous elevated sexualization (e.g. scant upper torso clothing accentuating breasts and indulgent skin exposure). While not without issue as they are (see e.g. Langer "subaltern position of women of colour" 98), this hints at the desire of progression for fantasy species as more than fantasy landscape marks. This sexualization in games in particular has been under increasing scrutiny for creating skewed images of female gender and sexuality, upholding heterosexual normativity and supposing the target audience as male-oriented (McDonald 4). However, the gender depictions in some texts like *Warcraft* are potentially deliberately ambiguous, in a mark towards something other than binary gender/sex axiom.

Bright follows a similar 'old-fashioned' trend of having very little female orc presentation: only a few individuals are briefly shown during the scene in which Nick and Ward enter the orc-run pub and two females are shown sitting with a male orc, who later turns out to be the local 'Fogteeth' orc clan leader, Dorghu. Females differ physically much as humans in (hetero-based) sex: being smaller, lighter and wearing largely different clothes and make-up. These few females do not have dialogue, and this one instance is depicted in a manner of exposing the female as 'accessory' to the male (cf. Vigil's "females as male auxiliaries", "Introduction" 12), a clan-leader

no less. This invites the reader to interpret the inner social structure of orcs as the one with political power having better access to females, that is being higher in hierarchy 'grants' them female attention, and trophisizes and downgrades females as shallow and trivial – objectifying. Not only does it transmit patriarchal and anti-feminist societal structure, but also animalistic analogue, as in nature where females of animal species which are commonly seen as signalling primitive forms of societal behaviour (e.g. wolves) are submissive. I strongly highlight the common sense ideology of this statement as there are fluid structures to even animal hierarchies, such as wolves or hyenas, where the female is the alpha of the pack/group. However, submission is often quickly bedded with ideas of female sex, especially in cases also involving the estrangement/reimagination of sex.

In fact, as mentioned above, some particular species have received overt attention, and continually increase to do so, as romanticized and sexualized tropes – primarily in sub-genres of fantasy literature, such as paranormal romance and urban fantasy. One particularly recurring trope is the desire of the female to heal or help the othered (were-, vampire etc.) male love-interest to accept his inner self, to come to terms with his 'bestial' and human self (cf. McMahon Coleman 57), which links back to fairy tales like de Villeneuve's *La Belle et la Bête* (1740) and beyond. Similarly popular is lifelong 'mating', which enforces the absolute monogamist relationship image to a fantastic extent. Most notably sexualized are the werewolf and the vampire, for whom the (dual) identity crisis and fluidity of physical form are seen as analogous to modern discussions of gender and sexuality (McMahon-Coleman 42, 70). It is worth noting that a major part of the writer and reader communities of these sub-genres, as well as the texts' human protagonists are females, while the actual species or creatures in these are predominantly male. Although certainly not exclusively, this serves to remind that fantasy is not a male-dominated field nor catered as pornographic adolescent fantasies as has been accused of games in general discourse (see e.g. McDonald 16). Orcs are an exception in that they have few depictions of females, let alone sexual

establishments – the males are not the racial colonial other savages that rape women during their raids, but closer to asexual and (masculine) monogendered beings, although a shift towards more traditional binarism can be detected, as is condensely analysed above.

I am not implying that females are the leading agent in creating more sexualized fantasy species or that one binary gender is more prone to experiential sexual endeavours through creatured/fantastic texts. More to the fact that the discerning gender and sexuality discussions originate from the feminist movement and, thus, are still deeply rooted in the field's basis [of female perception] and its inner struggles of "pleasure empowerment through romance" (Srdarov & du Coudray 348) and freedom of sexual expression which has then been challenged in the 'sex wars' as blind to its heteronormativity (Srdarov & du Coudray 348). A driving force in the genre's popularity and consequent publication rate is based on the combined efforts of multiple sub-genre communities. Simplifying or tracing origins of gender images, while beneficial superfluously, are exactly that – simplifications, generalizations. Thus, the Orc is not the re-emerging patriarchal dream (cf. Young 95) but a being still finding its own footing in all the social complexities that humans have had time to mull far longer.

It serves to keep in mind that the above example depictions are based on the assumptions that orcs have binary sexes, two genders and are primarily hetero. Feminist and queer theory have fiercely expanded the normativity of heterosexuality and gender duality, although so far more intensely in regard to science fiction (e.g. Pearson), and have proven certain concepts like gender to be social constructs. At the risk of contradicting the human-centrism I argue against by using such heavily human-based concepts, these theoretical fields offer not only tools but also concepts for de- and reconstructing fantasy species as nonheteronormative and potentially multi- or monogendered. That is, in accordance with Alexander Doty,

> --basically heterocentrist texts can contain queer elements, and basically heterosexual, straight-identifying people can experience queer moments. And these people should be encouraged to examine and express these moments as "queer" ... the cultural "queer space" recognizes the possibility that various and fluctuating queer positions might be occupied whenever anyone produces or responds to culture (3).

Because fantasy species are somewhat unrestrictedly depicted in fantasy, they offer fruitful preliminary platforms for gender ideas and explorations of sexuality. Speculative fiction has received criticism in this area, both for its stereotypical use of nonhetero and bi-genderized characters, even in attempting the opposite (see e.g. McDonald 34, 70), as well as for its escapist sexual expeditions (cf. Nakamura's "identity tourism") that, in their core, are not structured sexualities posing as discourse and role models but simple excursion of the imagination. However, as per Doty, these "queer moments" need not be simple windows to a zoo but encouraged as thoughtful processes that offer tools of identification by offering agency through the gaze itself (McDonald 16). Orcs are largely both terra incognita and terra invicta, which is rare in fantasy species and creature usage these days. We have merely glimpsed rather than gazed their self.

3.1.6 Race

While Helen Young's analysis of orcs is valuable as a more transmedial look into the Orc, it is race-specific – race as human racial-ethnicity, that is, and rendered through the racial logic lens. Circling back to the beginning of this chapter, I propose to take the concept of race as *parallel*, not wholly derivative, to that of humans, as variations of one species genus. If orcs are "a class of individuals having common attributes and designated by a common name" (Merriam-Webster, Species 1b), then they are not racialized 'interspecially' but 'innerspecially' as "group[s] of individuals within a species that are geographically, ecologically, physiologically, or chromosomally distinct from other members of the species" (Oxford Dictionary, Race 1). Of course, by doing this, they construct meaning, as humans do, through social dialogue and othering of their fellow races as well as

individually through introspection, which means the race structuring in itself is already human-centric. Nonetheless, it offers beneficial thought into the microcosm of fantasy and Orcism.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, games are the texts that offer the most variation in this species. It is important to note that in using variation, I use it, not as deviation from a set concept of one orc, but as a set of variations. That is, any variation, or race in this case, is not elevated in my thesis as valued differently, but certain racial attitudes arise in using the human frame of reference. Namely, that different races of orcs in a singular text deal intra-textually their place and identity in their world, while the reader reconfigures a double construct of this: one relayed by the narrative clues and another that is reformulated by *human* historical, cultural, socio-economic, and genre-related reality.

For example, *Warcraft* includes a playable subset of orcs: Mag'har ("uncorrupted" in *WoW* orcish), now a unified clan of tribes who refused to drink the demon blood that enslaved the majority of other historic orc clans, separated by a geographic portal in the past but who for some time have been stranded in the world occupied by their now 'freed' cousins and other species. Their history, geo-culturally divergent development and resulting physical evolving is generated by the natural laws parallel to how racial development has happened in the now-reality. To capitulate on this, they have identified themselves as 'kin' to the orcs long ago separated but have developed, for a major period, more or less in isolation rather than synchronically to their kin – only recently being 'exposed' to the extrospection of their close kin and other species. Their physical attributes connote the inner- and inter-textual history of orcs as they vary from black to grey to brown. Noteworthy is that while they in skin-colour seemingly connote the past racial logic presented by Young, the initial part of their in-game introduction and words of code of conduct for the clan, "Strength and Honor", are the same as Roman Centurions' oath. Seeing as the Greek and Roman culture-societies were the major founding influences on the modern Western culture and

civilization, the necessitating implicit Otherness of orcs seems an overstatement, even while holding fragments of imagery. In such small ways, the stereotypical can be reimagined inside the alternative fantasy reality, if the position of the reader is not initially lensed.

For example, the different clans of *Warcraft* have varying speciesist attitudes towards their clan-kin and other species, with some like Frostwolves "having brought a measure of mercy and compassion to the Horde, typically seen in Thrall's kinder treatment towards peons, who were once viewed as a despicable sub-race" (*WoW Wiki*), indicating a species morality not completely identical to humans but existing as its own entity. These peons are, in fact, instrumental as the material harvesters of the orc clans' wars. They mine and amass lumber for both the military and for infrastructural use. There are explicit prejudicial and slavery correlations in this but preliminarily marked by Orcish histories and discourse rather than real ones (cf. Young 97).

To compare, *D&D* has subraces of orcs, although many not extensively detailed, that are to an extent more 'developed' than their genus race – that is, they are not simple, violent Tolkienian hordes. For example, the Gray Orcs are described as "less bestial and a more civilized subrace of orcs brought to Faerûn during the Orcgate Wars" (*Forgotten Realms Wiki*), the Ondontis orcs are pacifists, and the hybrid breeds, Ogrillons which are the result of orc and ogre species breeding, and Neo-Orogs, indicate the high adaptability of the orc genome interspecially. In comparison, the Tolkienian orcs are elven-mutilated and Uruk-Hai are harvested off the ground after the human and orc crossbreeding process. Of course, this civilization effect as preferable is, again, appointed by human morality and standards, and in many cases that of Western society. Instead of mirroring the actualities of Western-narrated histories, orc race variations can be read as an organic process in progress (cf. chapter 4). I argue that many of the 'Westernized' readings are retroactively reproduced in texts rather than inherently propagated, which applies in the case of fantasy species and its various lens-readings.

The etymological connection of orc-ogre in the racial names above and in other usages of the orc species (cf. *Skyrim*'s Orsimer who are in-game commonly referred to as Orcs), indicates a larger thematic and meta-biological connection between the "Otherkin" of goblins, ogres, orcs, trolls and various other physically and characteristically similar fantasy species (cf. chapter 5). This is supported by many of the origin histories of orcs descending from ogres, who in turn descend from forefathers that generated a lineage of other species, their cultures sharing similar developmental stages without resulting in identical constructions. Orcs are perhaps the murkiest of this transmedial process because of their associated primitiveness and scattered use of expansion but are nonetheless partial in the vivid cross-culturally flowing phenomenon of popular culture memory, with fairy tale and fantasy creatures in a uniquely easy position in this. The close-reading example of *Bright* indicates no such bio-racial distinctions to complement the purely socially constructed clans that serve as racial identifiers. This, I argue, is possibly one of the major impairments in the movie's depiction and following reception. The creators posited the Orc in the social commentary field of humans by human frames without negotiating with the existing imagery – that is, not fully accessing the memory bank and its orc variation discourse (cf. 4.1).

3.2 Species Profiling

While Young's entire chapter on Orcs is invaluable as a driving force for further discussion on the matter of fantasy species representation and orc relations, she, like many others, present the Orc as intrinsically and necessarily originating in terms of reflection to the histories of now-reality. History is fixed, humans' various perceptions and interpretations of it are not. The creator of each text is, indeed, a human, but necessitating an anthropocentric point of view to texts involving exercises of imagination, let alone to nonhuman characters, suspends the reader to anthropocentrism as well. Via this, the reader is directed primarily to the immediate human

discourses which are currently trending. Compare, for example, the rise in more variable sex and gender depictions during feminism's rise in popularity or the influence of queer studies at the turn of the century in adding more diverse sexual orientations in characters, and the overtly increasing visualisation and inclusion of both in entertainment today.

Attempts as these speculative narrations of orcs may be, they are hardly exclusively done in mind of racial identification or any other social human construction. In fact, I emphasize that the sections even I have gathered as attributes in my thesis are, in fact, social *constructs* created in tandem by academics and the subjects of research, and that these constructs are continuously renegotiated as valid representations, or not, of the surrounding reality. Thus, even my approach, while attempting to do a reading counter to specific lenses, is using *a* lens provided by human theorists. Along the lines of Burkitt's criticism towards situatedness, "we can never attain 'objective' knowledge of a world that exists separately from our own subjectivity" and "we never understand the world from some passive and disinterested spot, but always from within an active and related perspective" (70). I also stress that while we should be aware of our limitations, such as placeness and perception, we need not be limited *by them*. Furthermore, I am dealing with conceptual traits as attributes that are hardly fixed or universally accepted. I am unpackaging reconstructed concepts, not to their original constructs but to partials of a sinewed whole in order to see the potential alternative reconstructions of the same partials. In essence, I am analysing abstractions – further, I am analysing abstractions as real in texts involving *elements of real* as abstractions. I am not alone in doing this, wherein lies the issue.

Let us look at the reconstructed partials, variations, of the Orc as depicted by *Bright*: Their genealogical origin is unknown – that is, whether they have a bio-physical connection to any of the species co-inhabiting *Bright*-world. Compared to other species, their physiology is predominantly characterized by high body strength and an acute sense of smell. They have little body hair,

prominent lower canines, dual-coloured skin and bulky body build as their most prominent features among other species. The exact nature of their spiritual affiliation is unknown with the exception of the folk hero, Jirak, who is treated as an exemplary spiritual figure, one who united the dominant species against the greatest threat to all life. Most orcs actively chose to serve the Dark Lord, while others refused. At present, they primarily follow a tribal-like clan hierarchy among their own species, and ones that do not affiliate with one are considered “unblooded”, unworthy of the tribal privileges (e.g. protection, respect), and are expected to file their lower canines to stubs to physically show their un-affiliation. Life outside a clan is rarer but possible. They have a binary sex (and gender) structure with females either numerically rarer or less mobile/visual outside orc communities than male counterparts. Most orcs, if not all, are from the lower economical classes, and are considered low-intelligent by at least humans and elves. Because of the past connection of a faction of orcs to the Dark Lord, other dominant species treat orcs with prejudice, which has, for example, lead to limited economical incline options and social unrest with other species.

I have attempted to do as neutral a profile of the orcs in *Bright* as known facts permit to showcase how a profile could be made of an entire species as if to be included in a wiki or a similar informative collection. Of course, this is a profile of a variation. If a similar profile were to be made of the Orc species, the changes would be minor, namely regarding physiology and sex, although even in these they would be partial. Indeed, in deciding to include, I am excluding something else. To compare, in concentrating on the anti-capitalist and consumerist in-text critiques, the analysis is “dismissing the ‘mythical’ aspects of the metaphysical battle between opposing forces of good and evil as historically meaningless” (Hassler-Forest 35). In focusing on racial logics of a certain species, we are sidelining other species of the same worlds. In concentrating on the religious aspects of a literary fantasy work, it becomes, superficially or effectively, “a secular work of fiction

which is *made* religious by religious readerships whose cultural and religious backgrounds heavily influence their interpretations" (Feldt 102, Sky 240-242). Additionally, I use spiritual because, as I established, all of the variations of orcs that showcase a somewhat unified belief system are non-religious. The equivalent of orc folk hero in dominant human religions would be saint, not exclusively as denominative of the Christian religion sect, but as a general way of indicating different religions' sacred figures.

Similarly, in choosing the attributes of the above analysis, I am necessarily excluding others, such as orcish language, that potentially carry meaning as much as others given the proper amount of attention. In fact, designating a single language for an entire species circles back to the animistic use of description in nonhumans, as humans tend to think each nonhuman species has their own signalling/symbolic system with humans as the exception with their various languages. While not entirely 'wrong', this assumption proves the anthropocentric ease with which people posit themselves and the world, because scientifically proving a similar intraspecies diversity is difficult. Of course, a counter argument could be made that placing such heavy emphasis on Reason and science is an aftereffect of the Enlightenment period and that there is no 'true' method of proving diversity among species that have limited cooperative signatory systems among themselves to establish a consensus. Humans can only hypothesize on the existence of nonhuman, animal and plant communication but I propose doing this without necessitating human-centrism.

Further, I am excluding a number of species and their subtleties by focusing merely on one species as representative. The *Bright Wiki* adds that "there are a number of magical creatures" in the film's world, of which the pixie-like fairies are the most visually notable, mainly due to the introduction of Ward's homelife that includes him exterminating a fairy like that of a pest. When Nick and Jakoby return to the station for the first time, the reader sees a brief moment in which a centaur police is guarding the perimeter, but each of such expositions of other species is always in

secondary nature, in brief images of the background. There are multiple interspecies relations of different proportions that have not received much attention under the prominence of human-other relation, and in placing these other creatures to the background, *Bright* displays a critical comment of this with or without meaning to. Ironically enough, I am continuing this by denying them a place in this thesis, but, for the time being, it remains to be seen whether they are de-objectified in future texts enough times to garner further attention.

In addition to selection, the profile includes the action of othering, which I previously presented as a somewhat perilous method as it easily involves perspectivized restrictions and evaluative aspects. The action and self/other concept themselves are not perilous but the previously mentioned commonly accompanying attachments strive the research of fantasy species to the precarious and murky waters of evaluative speciesism (Singer, Horta) rather than its descriptive form (Varner, Jaquet). As Young states, "racial logics depend on the *idea* that particular aspects – both physical and nonphysical – characteristics of any people are fixed. By creating a world where not only individual orcs but orcish and dwarven societies change, Salvatore works against this construct" (104, emphasis added). As other species evolve, so do their othered ideas of each other. Young refers to R.A. Salvatore's novel *The Orc King* (2008) that is set in *D&D*'s "Forgotten Realms" world, in which the orc tribes united under king Obould claim land in war against dwarves, but the dwarven king, Bruenor, in realising that they have an ancient past as harmonious co-habitants, convinces the orcish king of the mutual benefits of stopping the war. They even eventually fight alongside against a coup by some of the orcs wishing to continue the war. The act of othering is natural as long as these resulting ideas are not fixed and pre-valued.

I deliberately highlighted the use of human as equal in fantasy species in the neutral profile along with elves to avoid human-centrism in the act of othering. By acknowledging and attempting to be more consciously aware of the un-fixedness of species characteristics in analysing them, a

more diverse image of species materiality and relativity (to its genre, fans, popular culture etc.) can be achieved. I would also add that, rather than rationalizing this othering as an inability to escape various logics and subordination to Selfness as anthropomorfications, I suggest approaching them as an on-going identification of Orcism (or any species' own ism) and simultaneous individual developments out of collectively fixed definition. That is, the parallel abstraction of defining what the Orc (species *N*) is and concurrent complexification of such fixed one-dimensional characterizations. To avoid fixating on attributes as the exclusively defining features of Orcism, which has created only partial images of the species in the past, I will turn to cultural, natural and individual consideration of the *Bright* orcs in the next chapters.

4 Enculturing the Orc?

Orcs both are and are not cultural beings. Let us look at this statement in its two parts by first concentrating on the latter. Although, first, an understanding of what culture and culturality is is needed. Culture as a definitive term seems to be as elusive and fuzzy as fantasy – one knows culture when it presents itself in its various forms, performative actions and meanings. For the purposes of this thesis, l use culture as cultural studies broadly see it, as "culture understood as the texts and practices of everyday life" (Storey *Cultural Studies* 2). That is to mean that culture is a combination of the three understandings of culture as seen by Williams: (1) the idealized form of human behaviour and values, (2) "the body of intellectual and imaginative work in which -- human experience is recorded", the aesthetically produced 'art' as the body in which meaning is produced, and (3) the description of everyday social life in particular categories, for example defined by nation (48). There immediately rises a problem for orcs, as culture is largely fundamental to humanity and humans. It also promptly involves ethics, human ethics that for the most part involve speciesism, as per Singer and Horta, as evaluative, which should, by very definition, leave orcs outside culture. Orcs

are, after all, an other species – one that does not meet the norms set by humans in that they are more violent, allegedly less intelligent et cetera (cf. Pluhar's "normalism as moral significance" 334).

However, like humans, orcs cannot be reduced to simple logistics of physiology or assumed ideas – they are in-progress creatures as the rest of living beings, even if by originating from the collective imagination, or popular imaginative, as it were. Orcs are textual beings, not just created in-text by the author and then the reader but by the recycled processes of textual culture. Texts are open-ended in that they are never fixed to a 'true' reading and no two readings are ever duplicated. Fantasy texts and fantasy enthusiasts, in particular, seem to revel in their implied looseness and inexhaustiveness (see Storey *Cultural Theory* 230). By this I do not mean to insinuate that fantasy genre-culture is loose in the sense that it does not care or is cavalier about its inner logics. On the contrary, the open-ended nature becomes prominent in that, when intensive explanations *are made*, the fantasy community often reacts sceptically, even indignantly, as exampled by the case of midi-chlorians of *Star Wars* canon verse explaining the connection of Jedis to the Force. When extensive explanations are given, ones that denote closeness to scientific reason in subjects that are highly imaginative and/or mythical, the fans are 'robbed' of the open-endedness, the possibilities ad infinitum of fantasy (see Jenkins & Hassler-Forest 21, cf. chapter 5).

Texts and meanings made in and by texts are a fundamental tool of humans distinguishing their individual and social identity, their culturality and/or cultural place. Humans and Orcs both entail a textual materiality and immateriality. Just as culture as fundamentally human(e) processes and meaning-making negotiations, Orcism and the Orc, along with other species, are also debated in and mediated by the hodgepodge that is cultural knowledge and behavioural habitus in and outside the text. Orcs embody, discuss, deconstruct, visualize, and mean various things just as humans do as cultural beings – or, rather, they are made to mean by processes such as the former.

They are, as Lehtonen terms of all things abstract and artefact, “in a constant state of becoming” (Lehtonen Maa-Ilma 13).

Texts, narrativized ones in particular I would argue, are the key platforms on which such all-encompassing concepts as culture are (re)formulated and discussed (see also Jackson 14). In bare essence, the cultural processes as lived by (human) beings are natural, instinctive and instantaneous while their meanings are retroactive, primarily through texts, bearing in mind that I do mean texts in their broadest sense. While I do not promote the Cartesian differentiation of body and mind – quite the opposite – I want to emphasize the kindred fuzzy cultural playfield of fantasy texts that fantasy species and humans both inhabit and habitualize in trying to understand each other, respectively and interrelatedly. As textual constructions that are constantly negotiated by similar processes in and out of texts, it is rather condescending to solely focus on the interrelatedness. Further, it is one-dimensional to concentrate on this as interspecially solely on the human-other axis, irrespective of species or, worse, all species as a mass, and as meaningful only by relating the human as the out-of-text lived being with all its complex histories and meanings.

Perhaps the most important point to take from the comparison between human and orc, which I have quite actively discouraged as the sole collective definer during my analysis, is the fact that they are in different stages of becoming. Even though in 3.1.1 and 3.1.6 I established that the Orc, while messy and confused with its close related beings like ogres and goblins, predates the Tolkienian orc, it still is younger than the human – naturally, as it is created by human imaginatives. They are seen as the Neanderthal to Homo sapiens – a by-line species that is going to expire, although, it has not and does not only seem to die off by natural selection but grow in similar but not exactly same direction as their sapiens kin (see also Jamieson 108). They are also, in many respects closer to nature as was seen in the earlier chapter, which is often misread as nature and culture as opposites, with nature being primal, instinctive, simple, past while culture is civilized,

refined, complex, future, to name a few. This polarized thinking is itself miscued as these two are not opposites but highly relational, naturecultures (Harraway 100). In this sense, the Orc surely is *not* cultural but natural, but it also would imply that humans, by being other to orcs, are not natural but cultural, which, obviously, is not the case. For one reason or another, the Orc is continually read by this outdated bar of primal equalling natural equalling uncivilization equalling undesirable et cetera, which culminates in the readings forcing them into a stalemate of unevolvement, uninterest and uninvolvement (see e.g. Young 97) with many of the rest of fantastical species. I simply ask, why? What does it gain? What does it say about the people doing these readings?

If my choice of a rather crass common saying is excused, a "shoot first, ask questions later" policy seems to permeate the human narrativized collective action as is perhaps best exemplified by various alien invasion and mythical creature texts out there. Of course, the 'alien' species in each text is for the most part trying to exterminate the human race, the alleged dominant species, off the face of the Earth. The fantastical genres all have their own mass scapegoats: zombies in horror, aliens and robots in science fiction, and orcs in fantasy. In critiques, it seems, the subtle changes in these species' intra- and cross-textual beings are often analysed as subversion of some dominant 'true' logic that is inherent in the text and throughout others.

Since humans are "preconceiving creatures" in the sense that they must "preconceive dangers and foresee possibilities simply to survive" because they are physically incomplete (Lehtonen *Cultural Analysis* 10). That is, they are somewhat inferior to those possessing more physio-natural means of surviving like pronounced fangs and claws or speed. Orcs, by possessing these more natural means, do not necessarily need this preconceiving "survival kit of humankind" (Lehtonen *Cultural Analysis* 11), culture in which preconceived ideas are encoded, to survive. It would follow that orcs are not cultural, but I would perhaps rephrase that orcs are not cultural *by necessity*. Naturally, if the scapegoat mass converges and especially if it is self-conscious *and* uses

'bodily extensions' (e.g. weapons) on top of its natural advantages, it can only mean to humans that it is out for war and domination, so a pre-emptive strike is to be made to destroy or control it.

To illustrate the former further, compare, for example, Young's statement that "orcs embody racial Otherness which is always subject to fantasies of control either by extermination or imminent, albeit always unachieved, assimilation" (108). By not completely adopting and assimilating the cultural notion as humans, orcs are seen as incomplete, "broken people" as the initial montage song by Logic and Rag'n'Bone Man states in *Bright*. They have a choice to evolve beyond the limits of human survival and fundamental way of life, not as better people or broken-down adaptated people but as other and more, so they essentially pose a threat to human dominance as the super-intelligence above other species of their world. As long as the Orc is a Tolkenian mass, it can be destroyed by invoking invasion tropes or innate incapability of character, but when they involve developmental changes to something more, they are immediately controlled by positioning them as sub-par. Elves have already textually established their predominant preternatural superiority – what happens when the Orc, previously as sub-par to human, exceeds human position as well? Humans lose their centrality and, with it, their imposed dominance as the powerful norm. I say this is beyond re-emerging colonial dreams and postcolonial reads but, in fact, crisis of humanity. It is anxiety over increasingly more indescribable identity and the breaking of the illusion of control over nature, which humans never had, they simply cultivated in it by its own 'natural' terms and laws. Nature, if just in textual extension of the fantastical species like orcs, called out the bluff.

This is, of course, still firmly rooted in a rather anthropocentric reading, I am aware. What I am illustrating is that *if* some inherent implicit readings are found, the implicitness is always coloured by outside influences, such as choosing specific lenses or simply human-centrism, which assume there is actually a unified definition to humanity and, thus, they are always situated by

specific 'sub-humanities', such as nation histories. The texts and its components are, then, inherently othered and readings self-centred. It is not the act of othering that is contested – othering is a fundamental niche of thought processing, as a whole slew of theorists prove – it is the degree in which othering is employed as human-centric in discussing nonhuman subjects.

Orcs are not primarily cultural but perhaps secondarily so. As imagined beings that do not exist as such in the now-reality, they are unreal. Then again, they are real in as much as readers make them real in reading and, furthermore, they exist beyond the immediate text intertextually and transmedially (see next chapter). They signify and mean, so they are not only object but also subject. Then, perhaps I should emphasize that orcs are *popular* cultural beings, but this would mean they employ culturality in some form, whether high or low as cultural and popular are commonly affiliated (Storey *Cultural Theory* 13). Thus, orcs *are* cultural. I could go on speculating, going back and forth, but I leave 'true' Orcism as the open-ended question as any ism is in the hands and minds of humans. Let us agree that orcs are not cultural by necessity and by nature but are cultural by association to cultural beings. Instead, I turn to look at two examples from *Bright* that illustrate this rising, yet dismissed, evolving of the Orc in its respective surroundings, genre and popular culture, as discussed through the attributes and its variations of orcs. The first example looks at the common criticism of orcs as uncivilized (e.g. Langer 93)– that is, primal or uncultural – and the second at the horde-mentality and mass nature of orcs (e.g. Young 89).

4.1 The Urban Orc

If by urbanizing the Orc, the former primitive and racial associations are acculturalized as farther away from lived-in histories, *Bright* and its reception, at the latest, prove otherwise. With orcs as the proverbial 'minority', there are simultaneous enculturation and acculturation processes at work. As Yoon et al. state, "for ethnic minorities, acculturation is most often considered as cultural

socialization to the majority culture, whereas enculturation is the retention of or cultural socialization to one's culture of origin" ("A Meta-Analysis" 343), which, in the latter case, is marked by the Orc's recent narrativized turns towards nature and either elven or ogrish kin roots while, in the former, the Orc is continually either assimilated or, failing in that, destroyed. What is interesting in this division is that the enculturation processes are in progress in the interplay between readers and creators, as they are the negotiators of textual beings, while the acculturation is mostly seen in the lensed readings done by analysts, as I will demonstrate below. This is a simplification, as there are fluctuations in both, but, for now, I will work with the overlays. Even more fascinating is that, as a possible by-product of the implicit readings, the fantasy community through their texts have taken a more aggressive stance towards the criticisms of various inequalities they supposedly maintain.

By placing the orcs in *Bright* directly in the already highly socially debated context of racial minorities, class distinction and discrimination, and gang culture, the social commentary is no longer in any form implicit. As one of the reviewers of the film on imdb.com states, "the pitiful endless morality plays on 'all of us races should be more tolerant of each other' is delivered with the subtle nature of a jackhammer". The film employs social criticism towards its own world, its genres (buddy-cop movies and fantasy) as repetitive of their trope class representations and the common critiques surrounding them, without any of the previously implicit uses that potentially seemingly escape casual readers. I will not debate the successes or failures of the film in doing this here, as it is more advantageous for the species to look at the response of the majority of reviewers, such as the ones on inmd.com in seeing this explicitness of social commentary as "ridiculous", "boring" or "kind of shoved in your face when they pop up".

Bright is hardly the first text to use such a naked approach to respond to its general surrounding discourses. In fact, the film seems to follow a growing trend of disenchanting the formerly enchanted, mythical and fantastical by addressing their respective critiques as the present

hyperboles of their critiqued selves – not only its genre-tropic creatures but other tropes, such as social concepts (e.g. class) and plot (e.g. prophecies), as well (cf. Jackson 18). Compare, for example, the Amazon Original series *Carnival Row* (2019-), which has a similar highly prejudiced societal distinction between fae and people. It includes a faun character, Agreus Astrayon played by a black actor David Gyasi, that enters the society already immensely rich and expecting to be included 'as is' and not be solely judged on his fae heritage but for his socio-economically (elsewhere) 'earned' place. In fact, when one of the central characters, Imogen, inquires after the source for his wealth, he explains earning it by hunting down escaped indentured fae and that " if [he] was to find [his] way in the world of men, [he]'d have to play by the rules of men".

The series is not hiding implicit class questions but, rather, painlessly plainly points towards them – not only concerning racial connotations, class discriminations, both historic and present, but also the fallacy of social behaviour as performing and playing, or play-*acting*, not to mention revealing the human corrupted action to its own and other species as 'trivial sport'. Similar to the orcs of *Bright*, there is a blatant set-up of an imaginary situation of 'if you choose to see us [species, genre-cultures etc.] as x, then what happens when we *are* consumed by and singularly displayed by x?'. Discursive stage-ups and questions like these go unnoticed by majority of analysts in their endeavours to seek analogous social or societal meanings of the some of the things the stage-ups present. Meanings are neither singular nor static, which makes inherent analogies temporary.

In addition, when the orcs with their fellow species are set in their original world, often pseudo-medieval, their developments are seen as enculturation, but, once they are imported to the urban environment, the acculturation or assimilation is seen as evident for the various species' success or even survival (cf. the 'pest' fairies of *Bright* who are killed because they carry no productive meaning to society). That is, the species' success if it was measured by the dominant group's, the humans', positioned view. It involves a sound logic in that in acculturation the group or

individual is transported from their original surroundings and culture which seemingly automates a process of acculturation (see Mendlesohn xxi).

However, as Yoon et al. showcase in their study of acculturation and enculturation processes' effect on social well-being (SWB), "acculturation contributed to SWB via connectedness to both communities [mainstream society and original ethnic], whereas enculturation contributed only through connectedness in the ethnic community" ("Social Connectedness" 93). As their research is on a cultural minority group, Asian-Americans, partially identifying their cultural identity with a larger culture community, the American, this can be applied to the minority groups of fantasy, the orcs, with a similar dual identity. Again, to illustrate the duality of orcs, I take this human-centric analogous approach, but this is a characterization to show the community development of orcs as a process, not their racial connection. When the orcs are not only accepted but poignantly denied access and discriminated against in their new settings, the acculturation is already impossible and, further, harmful for their development in their original community – that is, fantasy texts and genre-culture. Indeed, Yoon et al. continue to emphasize that "both acculturation and enculturation positively contributed to SWB when increase in one cultural orientation did not entail losing the other culture" ("Social Connectedness" 93). This means that the context of the new surroundings and culture cannot outweigh the original for fantasy species either. This is why many fantasy species are never truly assimilated to human cultural contexts nor should they be read solely in these terms.

The orcs of *Bright* are not alone in this "maladjustment to a new setting" (Berry & Sam 4). As I briefly exhibited in 3.1.3, elves, such as in *Dragon Age* and *Witcher* verses, have also demonstrated a similar set of incapacity to urbanize – or *be urbanized* more to the truth. The elves of *Bright* are hardly accultured to humans either, but quite physically exclude their community. A more conducive approach, as I see, than solely reflecting current stigmas or various human concepts seen in human history that continue to this day, would be to study reasons behind the recurring

incapacity of the fantasy realm and their species and, then, what these speculations contribute to humans. A borderline antihumanist view to this incapacity would be that these species cannot assimilate because the human society is uninhabitable by its very structure and essence by being human-construed and based on at times skewed values of humanity, which is decidedly speciesist discriminative against any other species than its own and divided by intraspecies relations (cf. racism).

To compare, one could consider whether it is a coincidence that in cases where the fantasy world is inhabited by a growing population of humans or the world is that of now-reality in which fantasy elements have been transported to that often magic is disappearing (e.g. Nicholls), hidden (e.g. Potterverse) or forbidden (e.g. *Bright*). Human presence, after multiple iterations and variations, seems equal to toxicity of the fantastic (see Mendlesohn 108) or even a very real chance of genocide – of one or more species, including humans themselves – or world apocalypse. Perhaps in trending towards disenchantment and blatancy of its trope critiques, fantasy genre-culture is revealing that that which is reality is really as fantasized or fabricated as the worlds that are made of and are about fantasy.

4.2 Nick

It is true that orcs have not had extensively developed individuals to countereffect the horde image they have been characterized with. Some efforts, such as Nicholls' *Orcs: First Blood* trilogy or expanded game verses like *Warcraft*, have somewhat paved the way but have not managed to secure a 'popular enough' place to balance the scales. That is, they are either criticised for various reasons – for example, Nicholls' orcs are reviewed in Goodreads as stereotypical and thus insufficient to exorcise the mass image by simply putting the orc in another 'mass setting'. Alternatively, the texts have not simply reached enough people (e.g. *Warcraft* is popular but hardly

'super-global') to create a more complex consensus via repetitive negotiation of individual representations. Nick from *Bright* presents one of the few singular orcs to begin a more diverse outlook to orcs. Ironically, to define and understand something collective, like culture, individuals are needed to reach such a collective. There is no culture without individuals.

To lean on the previous section, Nick is at a point of acculturation to the dominant human society while largely deprived of the encultured origins of his species – that is, he is "unblooded" (see 3.1.3). This creates an interesting parallel to his species in general: orcs are developing as a species in their own respective worlds, they are enculturing, while the various criticisms aimed at them is based on the assumption that orcs are unable to acculturate to largely human societies because of their sub-normative attributes or simply cannot be acculturated because they have no individuals to uphold an original culture in the first place. In concentrating on the acculturation process, the other equally important one already in progress and in its early stages, enculturation, is sidelined. Thus, the Orc's very being is only partially recognized and its assimilation to dominant cultures, often human, as originating from the desire of the Orc is presupposed.

Nick is the epitome of the Orc as a species that is stating "they know I [an orc] do it for the people [the Orc] / I'm fighting so we be equal / For my son and my sequel" and that "we won't fall into the cracks between our streets" (*Broken People* lyrics by Logic & Rag'n'Bone Man). However, by not initially being presented as a leader figure – only after Tikka resurrects him do the other orcs reconsider their stance on him – or a regular *Bright* orc by being "unblooded", Nick is the bicultural in-betweener in danger of falling through the cracks of both cultures. Therefore, he is and is not a 'qualified' presentative of Orcishness or Orcism, but nonetheless offers a distinctive personal point of view for *an* orc through which a cultural image can be filtered – something formerly missing in texts, and dismissed by many analysts.

Many of the reviewers on imdb.com felt the film's dialogue script lacked in refinement, saying it was, for example, "clunky", "awkward" or "something a 13-year-old would produce for a creative-writing project", many of which were directed at the interplay between Ward and Nick and others more generally. Again, the successes or failures are not valued here, but an important distinction and contribution for this thesis' interests in this is that this "awkwardness" is, in part, generated very deliberately. For example, in their first shootout scene Ward asks Nick "no holes?" to which Nick answers "only the holes I was born with… how are your holes?". Ward, somewhat annoyed and bewildered, counters, "how the fuck can you make a shootout awkward?". In a number of similar situations, Nick shows a peculiar confusion in reading and reacting to human social cues, which is an indication of the film attempting to showcase the species' social distance by way of comic relief. This humoristic outlook may have affected the negative response as the othering is reduced to comedy. Nevertheless, Nick's actions are othered to Ward, rather than the other way around, making Nick's point of view, even if mostly implicitly so, a valuable cognitive turn in the individualization and self-presentation of the Orc. It remains to be seen whether this is built and improved upon in the future.

Another distinctive discursive addition, or rather continuation, to the reformation of the Orc is seen in Nick's status as a police officer. While the film somewhat presents the entirety of the police force as corrupt or easily compliant to corruption, with the exception of the two protagonists, at the same time it invites to associate the Orc, through the altruistic and arguably fairly naïve Nick, with the idealized protector and justice representative of law enforcement (cf. Young "police as a governing agent among chaos" 142). Fantasy texts have used a correlative rehabilitative method for example with the werewolf character, as in [DC Comics] Vertigo's *Fables* (2002-2015), in which Big Bad Wolf of fairy tales is incarnated and infused with the werewolf archetype character as one singular character, Bigby, the sheriff of Fabletown who self-initiatedly tries to reform his monstrous

past image. Even children's fiction, such as Disney's *Zootopia* (2016), adds to this with Nick Wilde – a fox, a former scapegoat of evil, malicious cunning et cetera in fairy and folk tales, eventually becomes a cop. The occupational status is a clear attributive signal that a larger development cross-textually and transmedially is in progress, but cues, such as subtle individualization and less subtle thematic repetition, have, unfortunately, remained sidelined by analysts concerned with various human-centric social parallels between fantasy and reality. Although, an argument can also be made of countereffect by Nick being placed as Ward's partner, the companion tank character in games or even as if a companion 'pet' (Haraway 106) to Ward's quest to become or be self-realized as a Bright.

5 Age of Men Is Over: Flirting with Genre Conventions, Tropes and The Outside

So far, I have examined the Orc as a species of various characterizations and as a potentially cultural being. In other words, I have moved from etymological and formulaic to expressive and textual and, further, from structurally ambiguous to (sub)culturally curious. I have often expressed that orcs are something *in* and *out* of texts, but the last chapters have largely focused on the former in various relations to their contexts. By outside text I mean the Orc's and other species' close relationship to popular culture which is not merely a collection of texts but a complex entity on its own.

Indeed, not only is culture but popular culture as a concept difficult to define. In fact, John Storey invokes six overlapping but still different understandings for the term but, for now, I will contend with popular culture as the culture for the people by the people (Storey *Cultural Theory* 9), but I also stress that this 'people' is a set of peoples constantly flowing like that of fantasy in its inclusion of peripheries and understandings of epicentre and that it is not wholly separate of any 'higher' forms of culture or academia. Storey concludes that the general differentiation between the popular and the cultural can be traced to the aftereffects of industrialization and urbanization (17). If we look at the orc, these two become quite distinctive others to them as they are primal,

natural and young. This is where the image of the orc as 'uncivilized' and 'misrepresentative as derogative' ultimately derive from: socially and habitually performed discourse by humans through human concepts but not simultaneous consideration of orcs' alternative other being. After all, culture and nature, urban and rural, even industrial and domestic are not polarities – they are simply structured and perceived as such.

In fact, Storey continues to argue that strategies to maintain "cultural and social difference and cultural and social deference" were invented for the high society/culture to be excluded from the middling mass (34) – a process that continues to date in various forms of art, entertainment and discourses. Even though the border between such distinct separation of high and low culture and art has diluted, some remnants of this social power negotiation, such as in literary criticism, can be identified, for example in the employment of orcs in analyses. It is no wonder that the fantastic genres, fantasy in particular, act as popular culture's primary field, both in play and serious dialogue. I would even argue that in popular culture play is serious and vice versa, while the high culture contemplates the serious and play as separate. Again, this is a simplification of the underlying pattern that I use to showcase the Orc's position as misrepresented by partial interest. This underlying negotiation, I argue, is where the fantasy texts' and orcs' imposed meanings, like racial logics, most likely derive from as they are applied as an "act of consumption (how a commodity is appropriated, 'used' and made meaningful)" and "who locate creativity only in the act of production, consumption being merely the recognition or misrecognition of the aesthetic intention" (Storey 226).

Indeed, in doing so, the analysts of species like orcs most likely unknowingly are exercising a form of social power to maintain orcs, and through them fantasy, as 'populist' and 'low', which affects their production and receipt as such as well. Although, as Fiske argues, "as social power can take many forms, so too can the resistances to it" and "there is no singular blanket resistance, but

a huge multiplicity of points and forms of resistance, a huge variety of resistances" (319), which is seen in fantasy's continued use of its species 'as is' with largely subtle and slow changes overall. Thus, if the orc's development has been seemingly intermittent, erratic and slow, it is because fantasy genre-culture and the permeating umbrella popular culture are not merely conforming to the criticism. They are, instead, acknowledging this criticism and relaying it by appointing subtle remodellings and negotiations of these species through multiple texts – or at least the various people, both author and reader, discoursing behind these are. Fantasy's and orcs' inner multiplicities, controversies and developments can, and I implore them to, be seen as "the exercise of the power to be different" (Fiske 320). By *not* being completely politically correct, all-inclusive, sensitive et cetera and simultaneously showing already *being* cognisant and counter producing these criticisms parallelly in-text and transmedially, the genre and its tropes like orcs are showing power not only as resistance but power on their own accord (see Jenkins & Hassler-Forest 31). They are disillusionary in their highly illusionist – fantastical – depiction.

In fact, when orcs are analysed as derogative, they are often taken as singular textual constructions, when they really are not. They are no longer objects of their singular world's narrative and environment but have spread throughout texts and 'real' popular culture. This is predominantly because of fantasy's connection, and these days I would even say co-creative or even co-originative status, to the monstrously extensive and yet hazily descriptive popular culture and even mass entertainment consumption. Consider, for example, the role of a reader in 'jumping in' to a fantasy world and narrative in which the initial protagonist point of view even is not necessarily the leading clue to reader situatedness (e.g. moral hero of narrative or humanity), let alone the completely open, unknown and infinitely imaginative in possibilities, world:

> Protagonists in [these] fantasies more often achieve control over self than over environment (although the self may take many forms in a fantastic world), and the ideational structure is psychological. As Bachelard observes of reveries, ''They situate us in a world and not in a

> society.'' And the objects, events, and beings that we encounter in this fantastic world—however impossible—must exist in a fullness of affect that enables us to respond to them as though they were real. (G. Wolfe "The Encounter" 74)

The world of a single fantasy text is always (e)special but also entirely common in its possible uses of tropes et cetera, even in subversions, rejections and other textual formations (Harvey 33). Including, for example, an orc as a species, it immediately ignites the popular culture memory and its offered cross-textual and transmedial meanings, which are weighted and analysed vis-à-vis with the present representation (Kukkonen 263). Thus, readers are not only thrown into these lived-in worlds, not just societies, lived-in by other readers and the species/characters in the text itself pre-reader injection. They are also, through the text and its trope occupants, transported transmedially to a (set of) world(s) within a 'real' world: the now-reality.

In other words, readers are not only navigating the text's world but also the immense popular cultural world that serves as its expanded (uni)verse with its inner volumes, communities, subcultures, special editions, discourses et cetera (see Harvey 13, Mendlesohn 99). This verse has no homogenous canon, no unifyingly determined one, but one of multiple sets (see Mendlesohn "several fuzzy sets" xvii) that is constantly flexing and flowing, not from above or below but in-between the texts and the people. Thus, the popular culture *memory* serves as an apt analogy and theory as memory is not perfect, often mnemonic but also highly affective-based. This is one of the things that separates the popular and the cultural memory, as affect for popular is the affect of the interplay between various creators, readers and mediums (Harvey 27) rather than the evaluative affect defined by the membership of social groups, like particular cultures of humans or academia.

This is assuming such a *strict* distinction pertains. The high cultural, hard to define and poignantly existent as they are, are essentially formalists in that they define by exclusion, delineation and qualitative valuation over more 'common' forms of art (Storey *Cultural Theory* 220). In contrast, popular culture is a more flowing non-specifically inclusive group of people. These

people are liberal advocates of more undefinable meanings made in performed actions of their own surroundings and the textual worlds as if these two were largely inseparable (Storey *Cultural Theory* 220). Popular culture with its constant fluidity is what perhaps discourages further academic attention towards orcs as valuable topics by themselves as well as in relation to other species, texts et cetera, because of their part in this open-endedness, which it need not do. Orcs present a significant other and otherness (Haraway 116) rather than mirror-images of humans, which, I as I see it in this thesis, is a valuable addition as a source for study on further nonhuman interests.

Single fantasy texts can, and almost always do, express this otherworldly, popular cultural connection often in larger thematic forms but also by single in-text cases. For example, *Bright* includes a scene in which Ward, Nick and Tikka are surrounded by Fogteeth orc gang members and Ward tries to discourage them by stating that "I need you to return to your vehicles and drive home safely so I need *you* [points at an orc] to take your fat, Shrek-lookin' ass back to your vehicle and drive the *fuck* home to Fiona! Alright?". This statement not only references the well-known Dreamworks' *Shrek* series (2001-2010) that itself is a parody of fantasy and fairy tale tropes, characters et cetera but also uses it 'incorrectly'. Shrek is, in fact, an ogre and one who, despite his supposed physical and characteristic hideousness, obtains a happy ending with a princess, which is something orcs have not reached collectively or rarely individually (cf. Nick being "blooded" by saving Ward in the end). The fact that ogres and orcs in this case are used interchangeably is deliberately used by Ward as a derogatory remark of the different species as substitutable in character and appearance. It can also be seen as evidence of the general attitude and 'whateverness', the uneducatedness on species complexity, directed at both species and even fantasy species collectively.

Ward's comment is not only reflective of the general attitude, and by general I do not mean the people of the film's general public or popular culture, but the comment is used as a very unsubtle

Easter egg. In fact, by making it so negatively presented, obvious and incorrect, the film offers a metatextual comment on this common practice of fantasy literature by using a 'wrong' reference to incite indignation on the orcs' behalf. Many of the negative reviewers of the film on imdb.com, for example, mentioned this one instance in an otherwise short review to prove the film's inadequacy to balance the fantastic and real. As Young argues, "sympathetic representations of conventional monsters have become almost *de rigeur* in popular culture" (89). The indignation as sympathetic to the orcs did not succeed because there are not enough representatives of urban fantasy visual entertainment, the form that often receives most attention due to its easy availability and preference of the mass consumer, to cite another as well-known reference more 'correct' of orcs. The reference was argued by these reviewers as breaking the immersion with its bluntness, and it generally was felt as "misplaced". As one reviewer on the site writes, "there are even references to 'Shrek' in this film. Sometimes allusions to pop culture and the real world work in fantasy (e.g. in Stephen King's 'The Dark Tower' books and Terry Pratchett's 'Discworld' series), but it's a total misfire here". This does not explain *why* the writer felt it was a "misfire", simply that it was. The responses themselves are marked as they show the importance of affect in the process of popular cultural references and transmedial flirting between texts and their occupants as them being 'done right or wrong' (see Harvey 15).

In addition, fairy creatures and characters embody tales and narrative tropes (e.g. Red Riding Hood as 'stranger danger' to children and [sexual] 'temptation', werewolfism etc. to adults) while fantasy species embody hazier ideas (e.g. naturality of elves). Fairy creatures started from simpler stories of cunning, wit and entertainment, and were later adopted to children as educative stories, and have been continuously complexified as well as disenchanted to and re-owned by adults (see chapter 4) while fantasy creatures did this in reverse. They were given certain attributes as 'cultural' and species-relational (e.g. elven naturality and orc monstrosity) only after which they

were individualized and given narrative quirks. They were adult fiction before converted into suitable forms for younger audiences as well. Because they started as more species-collective ideological entities, they are easily seen as simple frames to 'impose' meaning to from above. As Bolton argues, "previous theories explaining the emotional benefits of reading fairy tales have failed to consider characteristics of the genre which are unique to it, and which give fairy tales a hierarchically higher status than other genres due to the distance between the reality they depict, and the current reality of the reader" (398).

Another example of similar transmedial dialogue is seen when Nick picks Ward up from his home and they drive to the precinct. Nick opens the radio to listen to music, turning on Cannibal Corpse's "Hammer Smashed Face", which Ward immediately turns off saying, "we will not be listening to no Orcish music". Nick looks at Ward indignantly and says "that is one of the greatest love songs ever written" to which Ward replies as it being a love song in prison. While this scene is brief and is largely meant as a simple comical relief dialogue after a serious discussion, it participates in a wider discussion in popular culture of metal music being described as 'orcish'. Although this particular term usage is somewhat dated, the idea that metal is aggressive and 'monstrous' still prevails in the general imaginative. To some extent, many metal bands specifically cultivate such an image as a form to entertain and sell their product, music, but also as a comment on their self-appointed alterity to conformism (see e.g. Kahn-Harris 124). Similarly, orcs are presented as evolving in texts as variations and outside them in the surrounding discourse as rebellious. Even though metal is itself a subculture within popular culture, it is still, especially in its sub-genres, often associated both in popular and high cultural discourse as this orcish or monstrous "noise" as per Ward's comment.

However, there is also a sense of parodied self-awareness of this in popular entertainment with similar small comical nods towards its inner discrepancies of evaluatively connotative

behaviour. As Fiske notes, “it [non-escapism] is a direct response to the dominant ideology and its embodiment in social relations -- fantasy, at the very least, maintains a sense of subcultural difference, it is part of the exercise of semiotic power” (322), which applies to the subcultural, like metal, within the pop cultural as well. While one continues to hear ‘noise’ and does not see the hinted absurdity and hilarity, one “in the know” recognizes the clue as marking to other similar nods and their generated thematic discourse (Kukkonen 263). The same Cannibal Corpse song is used elsewhere, for example, in Jim Carrey starred *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994) in a scene in which Ace enters a club the band is performing at to search for a person connected to his case. He asks a headbanging person for help and even after the headbanger continues without responding, Ace thanks him and proceeds to dance ‘ridiculously’ in a country dance to the death metal song and hop around in the club in his Hawaii-shirt and otherwise anomalous to the ‘metalheads’ appearance and demeanour, which ultimately gets him thrown out. Similarly, in a more recent and even more family-oriented film, Pixar’s *Monsters University* (2013), the bright-coloured, both in appearance and personality, and harmless monster mom, Ms. Squibbles, drops off the young monsters at Monsters Inc. and informs that, while she waits, she will “listen to her tunes” which is alternative metal band Mastodon’s “Island”.

These two cases humorously juxtapose the most innocent and funny looking characters to somewhat hardcore metal bands in order to create a ridiculous off-placeness effect but also to connect the ‘monstrosity’ or orcish fame of metal, especially considering the soft-hearted monsters of Pixar, in this juxtaposition as off-placed as well (see Kukkonen 269-270). Just because the music is so-called ‘orcish’, the listener and producer of metal are not by necessity. Ironically, this can be applied to the Orc’s criticism as monstrous – that is, unreasonably monstrous and foreign to human – when not all variations of orcs are such nor their readers and creators conform to such ideas (cf. Storey’s hip hop example *Cultural Theory* 212-213). In referencing the metal song as a love song of

orcs, *Bright* reverses the roles of the juxtapose and continues on this self-directed metatextual commentary – that they, creators and readers in tandem in sharing these jokes, are both recognizing and ridiculing the perceived 'orcishness' of metal that exists within popular culture. Orcs are textually originated while music is acoustic, which means medial transition and infusion is being processed. Thus, orcs with such inside jokes not only participate in the transmedial storytelling or transmedial theme discourse via popular culture but also produces the latter, even in rejection of some inside jokes, such as the *Shrek* case.

One more example of orcs' particular projection in and by popular culture, which is not originally or exclusively from *Bright,* but highly prominent and by no means politically correct or unproblematic, is the use of orcs in memes and the playful, yet partially serious in its undertones, #orcslivesmatter and #notallorcs campaigns on social media cites, notably Twitter and Facebook. Most prominent orc meme references are from the most generally, that is outside epicentric fantasy fandom, known orc variant, Peter Jackson's *Lord of The Rings* adaptation trilogy: one of Gothmog, a variant orc invented in Jackson's third film, and his line "The Age of Men is over – the time of the Orc has come", and one from the second instalment's Uruk-Hai slaying an orc for trying to eat Merry and Pippin's legs and pronouncing over the dead orc body "looks like the meat's back on the menu boys!". In meme style, these lines are easily alterable with relatively anything – 'the orc' in the former line and 'meat' in the latter, or the initiating or following punch line, respectively. The campaign sites include various orc memes and un-canonical fake publishings by by-lines and Middle-Earth news sites, such as "Daily Gondor" in Facebook, which contribute fake material, un-canonical narrativized expansions, to the accepted 'true' narrative, the original text(s). While fictional and uncanonical, they contribute to the surrounding discourse of orcs explicitly.

As meme culture in the internet has expanded, and anything popular made into for example a meme that goes viral makes it more popular or a subject that has been by use of a meme made

popular, these memes and fake material can be understood as simple words of play in the fan community and general discourse without any serious meaning. Anything can become a meme, which does not necessitate power to the image or character, species, person et cetera used in it (see Jenkins “Transmedia” 945). However, the use of orcs as memes and the ensuing campaigns born from transmedial discourse rather than intra-textual in more closed fan communities, let alone the fact that orcs are in these campaign sites used as a species genus rather than singular representations, gives them agency as modes of communication *by* being linguistic-visual narrative-frame commodities and carrying meaningful discourse through the ridiculous (Jenkins “Transmedia” 944).

As Fiske states, “in order for the text to be popular amongst audiences whose social position produces a sense of difference from that [dominant] ideology, it must contain contradictions, gaps, and traces of counter-ideologies” (325). That is, orcs are made to be seen, especially in memes, as the sympathetic entity as well as simultaneously the highly controversial deformity of nature and refine: For example, the Gothmog meme line is often supplemented by the line “the time of woman has come” to denote and criticize ‘extreme’ feminism, but the absolute ridiculousness of the juxtaposed hypermasculine, deformed and political Gothmog is a signal of self-directed ‘fakeness’ of message. The Orc in this case works as the buffer rather than the instigator. Of course, it cannot fully decline the underlying negative evaluation, it is presented as criticism after all, but the Orc acts as the quasi-negotiator between humans and, thus, gains meaning and value itself.

Indeed, orcs are not only natural, cultural, and popcultural but also communicative, communicated of and communicated by and through. In fact, I argue more simply that orcs are natural. By this I do not simply mean the already discussed closeness to nature, their natural spiritualism or natural (i.e. seemingly de-urban-civilized-culturalized) way of life, but their natural form as a paradoxical, imperfect entity. They are rural (natural) and urban, collective and individual

– although admittedly to a lesser extent as of yet – genre restrictive and genre descriptive, as well as imaginative and real, and, perhaps most importantly from the alternative to human-centric point of view, they are not simply opposite others to humans but also signal meaning as other by being their natural selves.

That is, they act, or are being acted, as the guerrilla warfare practitioners of popular cultural resistance to and simultaneous implementation into the cultural dominance of the elite (see Storey 223) by using popular culture modes of communication (e.g. memes) seen as populist and trivial to discuss and take action about issues, themes, and concepts deemed serious. These modes are also often anonymous, which would connote homogeneity by being a part of a mass but, instead, "the new knowledge culture is enlivened by multiple ways of knowing" as a "hive-mind" (Jenkins "Interactive" 140). In line with Storey,

> Grounded aesthetics [popular culture communication] is the insistence that commodities are consumed (and made into culture) on the basis of use, rather than in terms of supposed inherent and ahistorical qualities (textual or authorial). In grounded aesthetics, meanings or pleasures are undecidable in advance of the practices of 'production in use'. This of course means that a commodity or a commodified practice that is judged to be banal and uninteresting (on the basis of textual analysis or an analysis of its mode of production) may be made to bear or to do, in its 'production in use', all sorts of interesting things within the lived conditions of a specific context of consumption.
> (*Cultural Theory* 226)

Of course, as was seen from the examples, juxtaposition and hyperbolically humoristic use of meaning-implementing is highly relevant in this resisting communication to counteract a more straight and open criticism – hence, the guerrilla or underdog image pertains of popular culture, fantasy and the Orc.

It is in the fascinating flirtation between the subtleties and the overt, in what and how they are in use and being used over and over that lies the meaningful, perhaps sometimes but not always analogous, possibilities of the Orc and the rest of fantasy worlds' inhabitants (see Jenkins & Hassler-

Forest 29-30). Like popular culture, it is in how these weave in-between texts as *not* descriptive of logics or inner truths as they are not absolutes and one-way streets, but more like the forest root systems with trees and other plants as the different representations that are readily visual to us but that entail a whole network of life under. This is not to say that popular, and with it the fantastic and the Orc, reaches from ground up to resist the sky, the supposed high culture, as it would be equivalent to self-imposed subservience. Both dwell on the ground and work from top-down, tree-to-root, but while the latter stops to gaze at the tree and contemplate its value as *a* tree – its outlook, place and possible placement in the forest, the properness of its 'nature' as a singular of other of its species – the former is interested in how the tree is connected to the tree next to it, or the bush, plant, animal et cetera, through the ground itself. It is self-interested by delving into the hows and whys of the very ground it is rooted on, its very base being of self as a tree, rooted and grounded to an underground network as well as the above forest and the sky. Analysis in this last sense, as I have demonstrated as an act of extended thought through multiple concepts, both theoretical and conventional reason, can be seen as "foragers [who] nurture *landscapes*—with their multiple residents and visitors—rather than single species" (Tsing 142). Landscapes, after all, are forms of contextualizing, imbedded with forms, meanings and relations but actionable *in use*.

6 Conclusion

The Orc is a species rather than a race. Its often supposed originator, Tolkienian orc, is not a species at all, but the concept of the Orc has been adopted *and* adapted through multiple texts as a species and further developed into various versions that are in dialogue with each other through the popular culture memory, through the constant interplay between readers and creators transmedially and performatively. They are textual creatures in its wider sense – no longer written secrets of individual reader and author in singular worlds. Neither are they simply intertextual frames and Easter eggs to

be collected and interpreted by exclusively genre-loyal readers, the fans, but popular cultural agents unto themselves, upon other fantastical species and creatures, and even to human relations. They are no longer genre-specific but genre-tropic. They are beings constantly shifting, still looking for and only partially owing to benchmarks of Orcism. They communicate, are communicated of and through, commuted, computed, and confused by them and by themselves. They are composite beings.

Indeed, in chapter 3, I demonstrated that even smaller units, like terminology, in the use of fantasy creatures and species steer towards a human-centric approach and analysis of these beings. I argued that this already creates a premise for a mirror-effect between fantasy species and humans rather than a more diverse genre and culture relational study of the species on their own. I used nonhuman ethics to illustrate the underlying harmful effect of treating orcs as a species non grata or, alternatively, as solely analogous to humanity. By recontextualizing some of the most criticized attributes, I displayed that by focusing on only specific attributes as selective showcases of the Orc's base character as racially charged or inherent of certain logics, the Orc is treated as object. This objectification somewhat denies the Orc an identity other than as an othered being to human concepts. This has potentially affected the interest garnered toward them and, through this, hindered the development of a unified sense of Orcism. In chapter 4, I demonstrated the Orc's in-progress conceptualization of its communal being through cultural consideration. The Orc is both enculturing as a species in fantasy worlds, therefore naturally, as well as acculturating as a being in relation to human cultures. Thus, orcs have a duality of natural and cultural character, a natureculturenes. In chapter 5, I moved this duality further to popular culture in order to exhibit the particular connection that fantastical beings like orcs have as agents of popular cultural discourse. In being the object and subject, the Orc gains agency as a species itself.

Along the lines of Haraway's repeated notion that relations are the smallest units of analysis that are significant at every scale (see e.g. 111,116), I have moved from smallest relations, such as terminology associations, to larger significances, like negotiative dialogue of culture as textually produced. I have demonstrated through the case example film's analysis and its contextualized, or rather recontextualized of its repetitive criticisms as alternative, relations that the Orc and other fantastical species are not simple tropes of fantasy to be used and understood as arbitrary but complex beings already in relation to multiple contexts and relations as a web. As I stressed in the beginning, this thesis is not meant, nor could it be, exhaustively precise on one species because of this interconnectedness of fantastical beings. Rather, I stress that the incompleteness and the imperfect are part and parcel of the very nature of understanding, using and analysing them and that this nature craves more attention in itself as well as a part of the lensed approaches.

Orcs and their fantastical cohorts are natural and cultural, by their own extents as well as humans' – this merits repeating as they are wastefully easily attributed as either or neither, limitedly and by predetermined degrees, in current criticism. The gaze in fantasy creature analysis and in criticism needs to shift from 'what is and can be found from the text' to look simultaneously at 'how what is and can be found is found' – on what terms and with what in mind. In addition, I suggest more emphasis on how the findings relate to their surroundings. By this relative surrounding, I mean, not only its immediate, that of author and/or reader, but its tethered and intertwined ones as well, be it genre-culture, fan community, or the almost impossibly manageable but highly influential popular culture. The attention of how they are nurtured - or not, really, in the Orc's case – and why there is a discrepancy in the Orc as nurtured by the genre-cultures and the prominent warrant closer attention, because orcs and other fantasy species already are and continue to become more involved and complex in present discourse, both in fiction and cultural phenomena.

Indeed, what kind of relations and contexts these fantastical beings have with other beings, their immediate context, the text, and, further, with the discourses that permeate and evolve through and by them, are beneficial thought processes and phenomena to more than just the fantasy genre-culture. Rather than focusing on inherent truths or logics, I implore to engage with the dynamics of contexts in fantasy and its inhabitants, both textual (e.g. species) and real (e.g. author-reader), to see that they are constructive and natural developments with merit as this thesis strives to illustrate. These can be further analytically employed as meaningful otherness processes and nonhuman conceptualizations that people engage in and which they develop – not as ready-made links to existing ideas as such but otherness processing as processes themselves, as telling of how and what they tell of the people employing them as well as their relationship with the subjects at hand. Othering and nonhumanity do not need to be human-centric with humans as a logical locus focus but as *one* of the relational cohabitants to textual and real relational contexts these concepts, and the Orc, engage with.

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Appendices

Figure 1. *Bright*. An image during the beginning montage in *Bright*, in which graffiti implies the current attitudes between species, imdb.com, 8 April 2020, www.imdb.com/title/tt5519340/mediaviewer/rm823875072

Figure 2. *Bright*. An image during the beginning montage in *Bright* of orc hero, Jirak, leading the Nine Armies against the Dark Lord, imdb.com, 8 April 2020, www.imdb.com/title/tt5519340/mediaviewer/rm3323614720

Figure 3. *Bright*. An image during the beginning montage in *Bright*, which depicts the orcs involvement in major wars of the history seen and known in 'reality', imdb.com, 8 April 2020, www.imdb.com/title/tt5519340/mediaviewer/rm4229584384

Figure 4. *Bright*. An image during the montage in Bright, which includes the pyramid imagery of humans, elves, and orcs, imdb.com, 8 April 2020, www.imdb.com/title/tt5519340/mediaviewer/rm723211776