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This is an advanced work in an understudied but important area of religious studies: the role narrative plays in founding, modifying, and sustaining worldviews and ways of life. It focuses (1) on whether one can make a distinction between specifically “religious” narratives and fantastical secular narratives since both contain supernatural elements and (2) on the textual properties (and surrounding cultural processes) that may enhance a narrative’s capacity to enable belief and practice. Directing readers to some of the best contemporary work on cognitive narratology and other research relevant to the narrative construction of “religious” worlds, selves, and experiences, the text brings together some major voices in this area of study—Markus Altena Davidsen, Anders Klostergaard Petersen, Laura Feldt, Carole M. Cusack, and Dirk Johannsen—though one might finish reading the relatively short volume (a reprint of a special issue of *Religion* published in 2016) with a wish that its publication had afforded an opportunity to hear from a few other important thinkers in this area such as, for example, Michael T. Saler and Victoria Nelson.

Regarding the first of the work’s two major foci, this work well illustrates how paying attention to contemporary texts like *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* and to the people who use them to fashion worlds and identities for themselves invites religious studies scholars to approach anew familiar questions like: Can one make a clear distinction between “religious” and “secular” narratives based on textual features? Can one periodize cultural production in this fashion—invoking a thematic of rupture—without playing into a presentist or Eurocentrist metanarrative? It is perhaps noteworthy that Feldt and Petersen, who both work with ancient material, reject any attempt to make a distinction between “religious” narratives and other supernatural narratives based on text-

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internal features, and Johannsen rightly identifies the attempt to make such a distinction as part of a modern project. Johannsen and Cusack share Feldt’s and Petersen’s historical attentiveness, engaging with the cultural and historical situations that have conditioned the emergence of fiction-based spiritualities—e.g., the emergence of the realist/marvelous distinction, which depends on related dichotomous categories like natural/supernatural and secular/religious, as well as the rise of an individualist, consumerist culture in which creativity and play have transformed from vices into virtues. In a sort of blend of what Davidsen calls “matter-of-fact effect,” “reader inscription,” and “onomastic anchoring” (see below), Petersen argues that the indexical use of “p-s-t-coordinates” (person-space-time) enables the establishment of links between features of the storyworld and the real world, but he also, and I think more importantly, stresses the value of narrative openness and indeterminacy in inviting reader appropriation. This accords well with the valuable emphasis Cusack places on play and imaginative creativity in the invention of NRM texts and other novel worldviews and ways of life.

Davidsen insists on the distinction between the religious and the secular and the fictional and the historical because he wishes to be able to maintain use of these familiar categories, and he draws heavily on the concept of authorial “reference ambition.” Davidsen’s effort to maintain problematic categories like “religion” and to claim confident access to authorial intention in studying how supernatural narratives afford novel beliefs and practices may be the greatest weaknesses of the text, but these positions are also provocative, indicating how some of the central questions of religious studies, textual criticism, and narratology are interrelated and invoked in any responsible study of these phenomena. These are important questions, worthy of debate. And it is no accident that the novel communities of discourse and practice studied in this work draw on fantastical texts that have regular, recognizable features—i.e., genres. However, the primary feature that identifies religious and fantastical texts, the presence of non-ordinary, counterintuitive elements, does not permit one to distinguish them based on textual properties. I agree with Feldt and Petersen that genre use or attribution is the determining factor; one might use Kripke’s language and say that use or attribution “baptizes” a text, anointing it with the differing authorities and purposes of “history,” “myth,” “scripture,” or “fiction.” Davidsen himself recognizes the relevance of studies of metarepresentational tagging of texts as “real” or “fictional” (and, one might add, the

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easy slippage that can occur between fact and fiction when such tags are added or lost).

Turning to the second primary concern of the work, Davidsen’s awareness of different texts as possessing different agentive capacities is one of the text’s greatest strengths, and along these lines his chapter provides very useful analytical categories. He distinguishes between two classes of ten “veracity mechanisms,” namely, “evidence mechanisms” that supply what Tolkien called the impression of the “inner consistency of reality” relative to the storyworld and “anchoring mechanisms” that effect the metaleptic transfer of reality from the diegetic storyworld to consensus reality (see Petersen’s useful reflection on the “metaleptic effect”). Davidsen effectively explains this in terms of text world theory; evidence mechanisms establish that the textual world in which supernatural elements are represented truly reflects the textual reference world, and anchoring mechanisms establish the relevant correspondence of the textual reference world to the actual world. Davidsen further notes that the conceptual blending literature may be used to account for how this cognitive trick of merging mental spaces or worlds is effected. Davidsen’s evidence mechanisms are as follows: matter-of-fact effect (i.e., the straightforward characteristics of realist narrative), teacher discourse (establishment of the narrator or, in heterodiegetic narratives, of relevant narrators as reliable authorities), and justification (citation of evidence as through intertextual references to other authoritative texts or characters or through paratexts that participate in authoritative genres like the map, lexicon, or footnote).

Like his veracity mechanisms more generally, the anchoring mechanisms Davidsen identifies are also subdivided into two classes, the “textual” and the “transtextual.” His textual anchoring mechanisms are as follows: author-narrator conflation (i.e., the narrator is identified as the author), reader inscription (the narrative identifies the reader’s actual world with the textual reference world), onomastic anchoring (a specific kind of “reader inscription” through the use of actual world names), and thematic mirroring (a hypodiegetic narrative bears “thematic” reference to the intradiegetic storyworld, inviting a further metaleptic leap to the actual world). The first of Davidsen’s transtextual anchoring mechanisms is strongly emphasized in Saler (2012), namely, paratextual priming whereby paratexts like maps, notes, and prefaces help grant fictional narratives the appearance of historical, religious, and other reality-referential texts. His other two transtextual anchoring mecha-
nisms are the hypotextual foundation (whereby readers may recognize the intertextual dependence of a narrative on or at least reference by a narrative to another regarded as authoritative) and metatextual reflection (when the author of the text reflects on it elsewhere in a way that contributes to its truth status). To Davidsen’s veracity mechanisms, one should add Feldt’s interesting claim that the kind of fantasy narratives that produce fiction-based NRMs is the subset containing purposeful, teleological cosmologies and anthropologies; Nelson’s (2001, 2012) and Saler’s (2012) work on Lovecraft, for example, could be profitably put into conversation with this argument, as indeed may Cusack’s brief discussion of Discordianism as part of providing background to her chapter on the Church of All Worlds.

Unmediated, this work would be challenging for undergraduates and general readers, but it could be effectively used by instructors in classes on, for instance, New Religious Movements or religion and SF to provide students with powerful analytical and explanatory tools. And it will no doubt be a primary starting point for future research in this area for some time to come.

Bibliography

Nelson, Victoria.

Saler, Michael T.