



Worldcon 75 Academic Track
Session 8: Fantasy and the Uncanny

Thursday 17:00-18:30
Room 209

Chair: **Sanna Lehtonen**

Abstract 1:

Olga Engfelt (Åbo Akademi, Finland):

In Search of Lost Myth: A Study of Alienation and Exile as a Literary Construction in Parland's Childhood Trilogy

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Oscar Parland (1912-1997) is a Finno-Swedish writer who was born in Russia, had German as a native language, went to Swedish school, was a Finnish citizen who introduced himself as an Englishman. Parland's personality crystallized in this exotic field of European, Russian and Finno-Swedish cultural and linguistic codes. This lecture attempts to explore the problems of alienation as an individual experience and a literary construction in Parland's childhood trilogy. Through a close-study of artistic expressions of alienation, this study examines how the description of protagonist's fabulous world view relates to writer's experience of estrangement. The analysis of the mechanisms and characteristics of child's magic-mythical picture of world aims to explore the metaphorical sense of alienation and the variable content of exile and nostalgia. The many literary references are significant in the trilogy. Therefore, this study explores how the European and Russian narrative tradition reinterprets in Parland's novels and how the alienation-metaphors are transpired in an intertextual continuum. The methodological approach is grounded on the Russian Formalist's aesthetics of perception demonstrating the artistic approach to reality, in which one penetrates the essence of things and releases their "invisible" meaning with the aid of "attentiveness" and "imagination". In the light of Viktor Sklovskij's terms of "making it strange" and "deliberately impeded form", this lecture elucidates how the autobiographic matter takes a new shape in the fiction. The result suggests both the philosophical, ethical and aesthetical root of trilogy and the writer's psychological ambivalence is manifested in the variety of roles as a multilingual cosmopolitan and an external stranger.

My name is **Olga Engfelt** and I'm a PhD student in Comparative Literature – Turku Academy. I have the master degree in science of literature by Stockholm's University. I have an equivalent PhD in literary science from Yaroslavl's State Pedagogical University, Russia (2005), where I have worked as a researcher and lecturer between 2003 and 2008. My thesis focused the philosophical meaning of childhood and its artistic expression in the Russian and Western literature of the 1900s the second half. In my current research *In Search of Lost Myth: A Study of Alienation and Exile as a literary construction in Parland's childhood trilogy* I want to explore how childhood's paradise is constructed in the Oscar Parland's depiction. Based on the intertextual Russian context, I want to analyze the literary expression of childhood in Parland's novels.

Abstract 2:

Sarah Becker (Independent scholar, USA):

Looking In and Looking Back: Childhood and Memory in the Works of Ray Bradbury, Diana Wynne Jones, and Neil Gaiman

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Though the works of Ray Bradbury, Diana Wynne Jones, and Neil Gaiman are numerous and varied, each of these authors has at least one text heavily influenced by events from their own childhood. In this paper, I hope to explore why these authors choose fantasy as the medium through which to portray elements of their own reality, and to show the ways in which each of them depicts childhood itself as well as the nature of memory of childhood. Namely, I will explore the ways these authors express the unreliability of memory, as well as both the light and dark sides of being a child. Drawing upon Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic as a "hesitation" which places a person in a liminal space between the marvelous and the uncanny, I will show how each of these authors uses the fantastic to reflect each protagonist's liminality as they occupy a space between knowledge and uncertainty, between comfort and fear; a space that they occupy because they are a child. While I believe it is beneficial to look at multiple texts by each of these authors to see how the thread of childhood and memory weaves throughout their works, I will mainly concentrate on *Dandelion Wine* by Ray Bradbury, Neil Gaiman's recent novel *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, and *The Time of the Ghost* by Diana Wynne Jones.

Sarah Becker holds a bachelor's degree in English with an emphasis in Literature from Chapman University and a master's degree in English from California State University, Fullerton, where she developed her research interests in fantasy, memory, and monomania in literature. She has previously presented papers related to these topics at the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association Conference, the David Foster Wallace Conference, the Sigma Tau Delta Far Western Regional Conference, and the California State University Shakespeare Symposium. In addition to working as a freelance editor, Sarah is the manager of the literary arts podcast *The How The Why* for the cultural center and nonprofit organization 1888 Center.

Abstract 3:

Stephanie Weber (University of Vienna, Austria):

Staging the Uncanny: Blurring the Realms of the Real and Fantastic in Selected Short Stories by Steven Millhauser

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The proposal wants to look at modes and representations of the uncanny in selected short stories by Steven Millhauser in order to propose a sub-category of the Freudian uncanny – a form of the uncanny which is performed and thus erases the line between the fantastic and the real, between material and psychic reality.

According to Bertolt Brecht, a representation or character which estranges is one whose subject is recognizable yet at the same time unfamiliar. This blurring of the familiar and the strange is exactly what defines the uncanny, which Sigmund Freud describes as something that should have remained hidden but came to the surface. It is, then, not the unknown which makes us feel uncomfortable but that which we know in a slightly distorted form, touching upon repressed fears or wishes. Freud elaborates on different categories of the uncanny, as the uncanny of the fantastic and the uncanny we experience in our day to day lives do not belong to the same reality and as such do not have to submit to the same rules.

Authors can, then, on the one hand choose to make their readers aware of the fantastic setting of their stories, or use this distinction to manipulate them by blurring the boundaries of the fictional reality and their empirical environment, causing a strong uncanny effect. The way people perceive what is happening around them, the way reality and illusion are set apart by comparison plays therefore an important role. As Darko Survin points out, Science Fiction is a genre whose conditions are the interaction of estrangement and cognition as well as the placing of reality within a framework that does not only mirror the author's empirical environment. Instead, this framework needs to allow a dynamic transformation. As such, he stresses, Science Fiction is not a reflection *of*, but *on* reality. In the analyzed short stories by Steven Millhauser, the uncanny happens at the intersection of Freud's original categories of the uncanny, the uncanny of experience and of fiction. It is the mode of representation and the acting of the uncanny that causes a confusion of material and psychic reality. If the uncanny is staged like in "The Knife Thrower" or "Eisenheim the Illusionist", the blurring of reality and illusion features even more prominently as these stagings operate through the blurring of the subject-object relation, with the position of the subject being blurred to a point where it becomes impossible to distinguish between subject and object, inside and outside, active and passive. Thus, as will be argued by combining theories of the uncanny and estrangement, the audience is thrust into a realm where it becomes impossible to distinguish between the real and the conjured: a realm of the uncanny which does not reflect their reality, but transforms it.

Stephanie Weber: I am a PhD student in the field of Comparative Literature at the University of Vienna, Austria. My dissertation deals with the uncanny dimension of the Freak and Circus motif in English and German Literature since 1970. I have published papers on this topic in the journals *texte* and *arcadia* and have received a Postgraduate Bursary by the British Comparative Literature Association in summer 2016.