Christina Flotmann
Ambiguity in »Star Wars« and »Harry Potter«
A (Post)Structuralist Reading of Two Popular Myths

January 2013, 394 p., 42.80 €, ISBN 978-3-8376-2148-8

The study combines theories of myth, popular culture, structuralism and poststructuralism to explain the enormous appeal of »Star Wars« and »Harry Potter«. Although much research already exists on both stories individually, this book is the first to explicitly bring them together in order to explore their set-up and the ways in which their structures help produce ideologies on gender and ethnicity. Hereby, the comparison yields central insights into the workings of modern myth and uncovers structure as integral to the success of the popular genre. It addresses academic audiences and all those wishing to approach the tales from a fresh angle.

Christina Flotmann teaches English Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Paderborn.

For further information:
www.transcript-verlag.de/ts2148/ts2148.php

© 2013 transcript Verlag, Bielefeld
# Contents

## Acknowledgements

1. **Introduction: Structural Ambiguity** | 9

2. **Myth: Its Functions, Structure, and Workings in Society and (Contemporary Popular) Culture** | 25
   2.1 Functions of Myth | 25
   2.2 The Structure of Myth (As a Reflection of Human Consciousness) | 33
   2.3 The Limitations of Structures and Mythical Ambiguity | 41
   2.4 Myth as Ideology | 44
   2.5 Myth and Popular Culture | 54

3. **The Superstructures of *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*** | 61
   3.1 A Structural ‘Star Wars’ | 61
   3.2 Dichotomised Frames: *Harry Potter* | 70

4. **The Mythical Ambiguity of *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*** | 83
   4.1 *Star Wars’s* Equivocal Messages | 83
   4.2 *Harry Potter’s* Ambiguous Intent | 95

5. **Evil Deconstruction** | 109
   5.1 Questioning Dichotomies: The Emperor | 109
   5.2 ‘Play With Security’: Voldemort | 122

6. **Villainous Heroes and Heroic Villains** | 145
   6.1 ‘Star-Cross’d’ Choice-Maker: Anakin Skywalker / Darth Vader | 145
   6.2 Villain-Type and Silent Hero: Severus Snape | 172

7. **Ideal Individuals** | 191
   7.1 Unity in Duality / Duality in Unity: *Harry Potter* | 191
   7.2 Type and Individual: Luke Skywalker | 214
8. Imperfect Ideals: The Women’s Question  | 229
8.1 Ambiguous Developments: Female Characters
in Star Wars  | 229
8.2 Stasis and Play: Women in Harry Potter  | 247

9. Individuals, Helpers, and Structural Necessities  | 271
9.1 Good Nature Versus Evil Technology:
Humanoid Characters in Star Wars  | 271
9.2 Structures and Formulas Promoting Social Equality (?):
Humanoids in Harry Potter  | 287

10. Structural Displacement: Ethnic Diversity
in Star Wars and Harry Potter  | 311
10.1 Token-Blacks and Evil Aliens: Star Wars  | 311
10.2 19th-Century Conflicts and Social Awareness:
Ambiguous Otherness in Harry Potter  | 322

11. The End(ings): Conclusion  | 345

12. Works Cited  | 371
Primary Sources  | 371
Secondary Sources  | 372
Internet Sources  | 387

13. Appendices  | 389
Appendix 1  | 389
Appendix 2  | 390
Appendix 3  | 391
Appendix 4  | 392
1. Introduction: Structural Ambiguity

This thesis approaches the wide popular appeal of *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* by reading the stories as myths. I assume that myths, most broadly defined as stories of origins,¹ have nowadays found their way into popular culture and survive in secularised form in what John G. Cawelti describes as formulaic fiction.² The two ‘texts’ I am dealing with in my thesis fit Cawelti’s notion of formulaic stories well as each features stereotypical characters and events and follows a certain structural pattern. I will explore through *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* in which ways myth attracts people, what it does for them, but also how it “distorts” ‘reality.’³

To validate my reading of the stories as myths, I mainly resort to the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, whose analyses of myth are different but also tie in with each other well. In a first step, Lévi-Strauss’s “Structural Study of Myth” will be used to arrive at an understanding of the underlying patterns apparent in *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* and the ways in which they generate meaning. In a second step it is then possible to apply Barthes findings from his study “Myth Today” and show how the familiar structures of formulaic stories help naturalise dominant-hegemonic assumptions and consolidate ideologies. The analysis and criticism of the tales’ structures does not only rely on structuralist theories such as Lévi-Strauss’s and Barthes’s, but is also partly informed by poststructuralist approaches, such as Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction. Both tales analysed not only allow deconstructivist readings, but also, because of the ambiguity inherent in popular cultural artifacts, themselves contain deconstructivist elements.


Lévi-Strauss notes binary oppositions and the attempt at balancing them as common to myths and folk tales and concludes that they lay bare a human desire to reconcile conflicting aspects of life.\textsuperscript{4} The structurality of myth he identifies thus has a comforting function as it offers a secure frame for human experience and moral clarity. Order and clear ethical demarcations come at a price, however, as they facilitate the generation of ideology. Louis Althusser defines ideology as “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their conditions of existence.”\textsuperscript{5} Ideology operates largely unconsciously and is often characterised by rather narrow and one-sided assumptions as it works towards making the complexity of life bearable and manageable. Binary oppositions are at the root of much ideological thinking. Not only are the two terms of an opposition dependent on and constitutive of each other, they also always imply a hierarchy. One term is generally privileged before the other as Derrida notes.\textsuperscript{6} This is problematic as it happens largely unconsciously so that people do not question it. The notion of hierarchy is at the basis of much ideological thought, as, for instance, when one group of people is seen as superior to the other. This ideological side to myth can become a dangerous tool if it is consciously employed to manipulate people into certain ways of thinking. Barthes criticises this use of myth which helps dominant hegemonic forces to remain in power.\textsuperscript{7} When abused, myth becomes an instrument of suppression for some and promotion for others as it prevents actual discussion about important topics for the sake of both clarity and simplicity. Myth, and this will be one of the central aspects of my thesis, is thus ambiguous. It has both positive and negative effects, it comforts, provides order and security, but it also manipulates and “distorts.”\textsuperscript{8} These two sides will also be found in the tales studied.

The thesis is roughly divided into two parts. The first one uses the Lévi-Straussian analysis of myth to describe the binary structures found in Star Wars and Harry Potter and comment on the meaning(s) they yield. The second section deals with the ways in which the structures mainly focusing on the fight between good and evil, hero and villain, divert the attention from discourses of gender and ethnicity, topics that raise concerns in contemporary Western societies. The analysis


\textsuperscript{7} Cf. Barthes 2.

\textsuperscript{8} Barthes 21.
will show that ambiguously, these ‘real’ issues are present in the two contemporary stories my analysis focuses on, but any ‘true’ discussion of them is avoided at the same time.

The second chapter directly following the introduction contains an overview of various theories of myth, chief among them of course the mentioned ones of Lévi-Strauss and Barthes. It links these readings of myth with Star Wars and Harry Potter via John G. Cawelti’s definition of formulaic fiction, the catalogue of which comprises genres such as the Western, Romance, Gothic and Detective fiction, Fantasy and Science Fiction.9 Tales of this kind have their largely binary set-up in common with myth in Lévi-Strauss’s definition. The chapter further shows how the issues of gender and ethnicity treated in the thesis, used to have, and still have, much to do with binary oppositions. Both women and ethnic minorities have suffered (and suffer) from being Othered, i.e. being made subject to a hierarchy that posits them as inferior.10 If discourses on gender and ethnicity have always had a structure similar to the one Lévi-Strauss described for myth, then myth and these discourses must somehow be closely related, a connection analysed in chapters eight to ten.

The third chapter of the thesis initiates the actual analysis of Star Wars and Harry Potter with a discussion of the tales’ superstructures, i.e. the structures of all respective episodes of Star Wars and instalments of Harry Potter taken together. This is followed in chapter four by a more specific analysis of exemplary scenarios of binary oppositions and mediators as set up by Lévi-Strauss.11 In the structural interplay between the characters making up the poles and filling the middle positions, light is shed on some of the most pertinent ideologies and concerns of the two series. Chapters five, six and seven belong together structurally. Their focus is on the close analysis of the protagonists from Star Wars and Harry Potter and the ways in which they relate to each other. The set-up of the three chapters foregrounds the structural focus of the thesis once more as the characters are analysed in a progression from evil, over mediator to good. The most mythical, i.e. static and formulaic characters, the Emperor from Star Wars at the evil end and Luke Skywalker, again from Star Wars at the side of good, constitute the frame of the three chapters, the discussion of the Emperor opening chapter five and the analysis of Luke closing chapter seven. Lord Voldemort, the chief evildoer from Harry Potter as slightly less one-dimensional than the Emperor, follows him. Anakin Skywalker / Darth Vader as well as Severus Snape are in the focus of the

---

9 Cf. Cawelti who describes and analyses many of these formulas in his work Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture.
10 Cf. also Derrida Positions 41.
11 Cf. Lévi-Strauss 130.
middle chapter six as the two most obvious mediating figures of the stories and Harry Potter, less formulaic than Luke Skywalker but still rather clearly good, is analysed before Luke in chapter seven.

It could be asked why a structural analysis focuses so much on the single characters of the thesis. First of all, as was just explained, the three chapters at the same time as discussing the characters, highlight the structurality of both tales being set up the way they are. Secondly, looking at the characters is in line with Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of myth. The diagram he drew in his “Structural Study of Myth” of binary oppositions and mediator clearly shows that on the level of the mythical story opposing and mediating characters symbolically stand for the deeper structural conflicts between, for instance, life and death or good and evil.\(^\text{12}\) The diagram further highlights the relationships between characters and by extension the relationship between the binary oppositions at the root of the tales. The interplay between the characters, e.g. the good and evil ones, makes clear the degree to which the two terms of binaries are dependent on each other for their existence. A good character would be rather pointless without an evil one to consolidate his or her goodness. Characters in mythical and formulaic stories are thus always carriers of meaning rather than realistic individuals. They carry out the deep-structural conflicts and support the themes the stories deal with. Incidentally, this reading is supported by an interesting statement eminent actor Sir Alec Guinness who played the role of Jedi Obi-Wan Kenobi in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, made on reading the script for the first time: “I thought the dialogue was pretty terrible and the characters fairly meaningless – but there was a story value.”\(^\text{13}\) The single elements of the tales such as dialogue or characters, do not matter as much as the story in its entirety. Another statement by Robert Ellwood is illuminating here: “Myth is symbol in narrative form.”\(^\text{14}\) Every element within the narrative has to conform to its symbolic purpose.

Still, the thesis will determine to which degree the two stories go beyond their structural focus and try to portray their characters as individual within the limits set by the structures. This is a question that is predominantly relevant for chapters eight to ten focusing on the discourses ‘silenced’ by the structures. Chapter eight looks at the ways women are treated in the tales and explores to which degree some of them are individual although their stories are definitely subordinated to those of the male heroes. Chapter nine discusses the various humanoid characters populating both

\(^{12}\) Cf. Lévi-Strauss 130.


Star Wars and Harry Potter and analyses the functions they have as helpers of the protagonists on the level of the story but also on a meta-level as projection space for ‘real-life’ social issues of which an open discussion is shirked. Chapter ten finally analyses the treatment of ethnic minorities in the tales which ranges from almost total exclusion and ‘making white’ to at least an implicit awareness of their plight. Chapter eleven, the conclusion, makes use of the endings of both stories to focus and summarise the main findings of the thesis.

As the first Star Wars movies appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s, much criticism was produced then which now appears a trifle outdated. The research on the films exemplifies the late 20th-century shift in focus to cultural studies and away from structuralism to poststructuralism. I believe the absolute nature of this shift and the accompanying utter rejection of structuralism is very harsh, and my thesis will show that structuralism can be a useful tool in the analysis of formulaic stories whose popularity, after all, is unbroken as is exemplified by the two objects of my study. Many of the books and articles written on Star Wars during the 1980s have a structuralist approach. They exploit the often-stressed connection between George Lucas and Joseph Campbell who had outlined the stages of the mythical hero’s voyage in his influential work The Hero With a Thousand Faces. Often, these structural analyses remain on the surface and do not yield any deeper insight than the fact that Lucas obviously did use the patterns defined by Campbell for his stories. Several of the critics combine the structuralist with a psychoanalytic focus, interpreting Campbell’s heroic journey as each individual’s personal voyage to selfhood in the course of which initiatory thresholds need to be crossed and ‘monsters’ slain but which ends with the integration of all aspects of the personality and produces a complete human being who brings/is a boon for his/her society. Examples of this kind of analysis are Andrew Gordon’s 1980 article “The Empire

16 The best example of this type of research on Star Wars was actually published in the late 1990s showing that Campbellian analysis of the movies had not even completely lost its appeal by then. Stuart Voytilla in his book Myth and the Movies: Discovering the Mythic Structure of 50 Unforgettable Films (Ventura: Wiese, 1999 ) 274-91 does nothing but describe the hero’s journey as outlined by Campbell in the four movies existent at that point. Further literature highlighting the idea of Star Wars as myth, for instance, comprises Mary Henderson’s catalogue accompanying the exhibition “Star Wars: The Magic of Myth” (Mary Henderson, Star Wars: The Magic of Myth (New York: Bantam Books, 1997)) as well as the Dorling Kindersley companion Star Wars: The Power of Myth (New York: Dorling Kindersley, 1999).
Strikes Back: Monsters from the Id,” 17 Martin Miller’s and Robert Sprich’s “The Appeal of Star Wars: An Archetypal-Psychoanalytic View,” 18 from 1981 as well as Marilyn R. Sherman’s “Star Wars: New Worlds and Ancient Myths” (1979). 19 Although I also mention Joseph Campbell in the course of the thesis, the approaches of these scholars differ from mine. First of all, I rely on Lévi-Strauss to analyse the stories’ structures more than on Campbell. Secondly, while the works of these critics remain largely descriptive, I use structural analysis to explore the cultural meanings binary patterns create within the stories as well as potential effects they have on readers. Thirdly, I am not much interested in psychoanalytic readings which in my opinion restrict the meaning generated in the movies to a highly personal and internal level. I do not believe that the movies only reproduce each person’s singular journey to fulfilment and rather interpret them as influencing a collective consciousness and dealing with wider social concerns, such as, for instance, questions of gender and ethnicity. The relevance of these latter topics and their partly problematic treatment can too easily be explained away by a psychoanalytic viewpoint. 20

Later researchers justly criticise what they perceive as the intent behind the Campbellian analysis of Star Wars. They reproach the earlier critics of actually elevating the stories to a mythical level by their uncritical application of Campbell’s theories and of playing to the interests of George Lucas and the merchandising machinery. 21 Fulfilling Campbell’s criteria does not make the stories mythical according to these critics. They rather see mechanisms of manipulation similar to those Barthes finds in communication of any sort, at work, whereby films such as

21 In fact, George Lucas has openly avowed that in creating Star Wars, he intended to produce a myth (Cf. Laurent Bouzereau, Star Wars: The Annotated Screenplays (New York: Del Rey, 1997) 27).
the Star Wars episodes can be sold in such a way that some people immensely profit by it. Turning Star Wars into myth according to Daniel Mackay “is to obscure from whence comes the authority – ‘the Force’ – behind Star Wars. The authority behind the Star Wars story is not a universal mythic faculty within the human psyche, it is Joseph Campbell.”22 Similar to me, Mackay looks at the downside of myth as tool of ideological manipulation. “Our mythology,” he says “is the electronic archiving of quantified individuality according to scientific methods, and an implementation of this process in order to serve capitalism upon which our economy is based.”23 As this quote shows, his focus is largely on how myth shapes people to suit the demands of capitalist economy. My approach rather looks at social implications of ideology perpetuated by myth, such as views on matters of gender and ethnicity. Furthermore, Mackay has an entirely negative attitude toward myth and sees its sole use today in the furthering of economic interests. As my thesis will show, myth has a double function, it is ambiguous. It certainly has all the negative implications Mackay identifies but it also has positive sides: it creates community by stressing universal issues, it comforts and its moral simplicity helps people orient themselves in a complex world. In contrast to Mackay, I believe that Star Wars and Harry Potter for that matter do retain some “remnants of the old mythologies” which he claims “no longer carry weight in the way we live our lives today.”24

The research conducted on the more recent instalments of the Star Wars saga is predominantly informed by contemporary cultural studies approaches to topics such as gender, ethnicity and ‘race,’ which are also part of my thesis. Three works need to be highlighted in this context. The first is a volume of essays on Star Wars called Culture, Identities and Technology in the Star Wars Films: Essays on the Two Trilogies, edited by Carl Silvio and Tony M. Vinci.25 The editors’ intention of moving beyond the mythical criticism of the films is already made clear by the heading of the book’s introduction “Moving Away from Myth: Star Wars as Cultural Artifact.”26 The editors and the contributors obviously felt, similar to Barthes, that myth “distorts” and that therefore the mythical readings of the films

23 Mackay 71.
24 Mackay 74.
‘naturalised’ issues of gender and ethnicity and produced an undifferentiated and uncritical attitude towards them.\textsuperscript{27} I agree with them, although I think it worthwhile, especially since \textit{Star Wars} has so widely been associated with myth to more specifically analyse how exactly myth works in the films. This analysis can then be used as a basis for a discussion of the ways in which contemporary discourses such as the ones mentioned are veiled by mythical structures. I am not convinced that the concepts of ‘myth’ and ‘cultural artifact’ can easily be opposed. A myth is a cultural artifact as it comes into being in a certain culture at a certain (possibly trying) point in time and is perpetuated through ritual and retelling. It is, as mentioned before, restrictive to view myth completely negatively. The second well-researched collection of essays is Matthew Wilhelm Kapell’s and John Shelton Lawrence’s 2006 \textit{Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise: Fans, Merchandise, and Critics}.\textsuperscript{28} This book also deals with the issues of myth, religion, and spirituality in the films but also treats issues of sexuality, gender and ‘race.’ \textit{Star Wars}, and this is something that my analysis will also show, very much moves between its naturalising mythical attributes and a more conscious ideologically critical stance. The third book in this vein is Kevin J. Wetmore Jr.’s \textit{The Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion and Rebellion in the Star Wars Films} which contains excellent and ideologically critical analyses of the women, the characters with an ‘ethnic background’ as well as the humanoid of the stories.\textsuperscript{29} His findings will be relevant for my chapters on gender, the humanoid characters and the treatment of ethnic minorities.

The last volume that needs to be mentioned with respect to \textit{Star Wars} is Michael J. Hanson’s and Max S. Kay’s \textit{Star Wars: The New Myth} from 2001 which obviously deals with questions similar to the ones my thesis raises. The brazen statement of the title “\textit{The New Myth}” shows that Hanson’s and Kay’s interest lies in proving that \textit{Star Wars} is indeed the new myth of our time, the story that, as they somewhat naively state in the conclusion to their work “best explains us as a people.”\textsuperscript{30} Basically, their work is in line with the earlier Campbellian and psychoanalytic readings, as they use C.G. Jung and Joseph Campbell for their scene-to-scene mythical analysis. Like the older works their book remains on a descriptive level at times. And although Hanson and Kay briefly analyse some of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Cf. Barthes 21.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Matthew Wilhelm Kapell and John Shelton Lawrence, eds., \textit{Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise: Fans, Merchandise, and Critics} (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).
\item \textsuperscript{29} Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., \textit{The Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion and Rebellion in the Star Wars Films} (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2005).
\item \textsuperscript{30} Michael J. Hanson and Max S. Kay, \textit{Star Wars: The New Myth} (n.p.: Xlibris Corporation, 2001) 428.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the main themes of the films such as free will versus fate and look at particular characters which also feature in my analysis, the main difference between their approach and mine is that they expressly set out to prove that *Star Wars* is myth. This is not the main object of my thesis. I rather use theories of myth to shed light on the structures that shape and limit us as human beings and to find a possible explanation of why *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* attract so many people in the way they do. In sum it can be said that the research on *Star Wars* has always moved between Campbellian mythical interpretations and analyses exposing the ideological level of the tales. My thesis links the two approaches as it offers a discussion of both the stories’ structures and the ideological problems generated by them.

A much larger amount of research has been done on *Harry Potter* than on *Star Wars* and the phenomenon has spurred a miscellany of books and articles. In general it can be said that research on the novels is rather diverse. Criticism focuses on the characters, themes such as good and evil and free will / choice, fandom, the economic effects of the books and films as well as standard cultural studies themes such as gender and ethnicity, also treated in the more recent writings on *Star Wars*. Readings approaching the novels from a structural point of view are rare. The few examples I found provide a reading in the style of Campbell often coupled with a Jungian approach focusing on the hero’s journey. M. Katherine Grimes’s article “Harry Potter: Fairy Tale Prince, Real Boy and Archetypal Hero,” as well as Julia Boll’s “Harry Potter’s Archetypal Journey” are cases in point. To the best of my knowledge there is no analysis which focuses on the binaries informing the novels choosing a Lévi-Straussian approach and only Vandana Saxena in her 2012 study *The Subversive Harry Potter: Adolescent Rebellion and Containment in the J.K. Rowling Novels* actually mentions the anthropologist. The results of my thesis thus complement and add to the structural analyses performed on *Harry Potter* so far.

Unfortunately, among the multitude of books published on the boy wizard, many remain on a merely descriptive surface level in their analysis. Prime examples are Sandy Andrea Kolbuch’s *Mythische Elemente in der modernen Fantastischen*  

Literatur, erläutert am Beispiel von Joanne K. Rowling’s [sic] Harry Potter.\textsuperscript{34} Linda Jelinek’s Das Phänomen Harry Potter: Eine Literaturwissenschaftliche Analyse des Welterfolgs from 2006,\textsuperscript{35} Sandra Bak’s 2004 Harry Potter: Auf den Spuren eines zauberhaften Bestsellers\textsuperscript{36} and Claudia Fenske’s Muggles, Monsters and Magicians: A Literary Analysis of the Harry Potter Series from 2008.\textsuperscript{37} Other works, though non-academic prove to be insightful and valuable. Among them Travis Prinzi’s book Harry Potter and Imagination: The Way Between Two Worlds (2009) needs to be specially mentioned.\textsuperscript{38} Prinzi notices similar themes in the books that I do: he treats fear, evil, sacrifice as well as questions of ‘race’ and gender. However, while my analysis is based on a structural reading of the tales, i.e. on looking at how the themes described affect and are affected by the structures of the novels, Prinzi’s discussion is character-based. This becomes obvious when he comments on Rowling’s, as he believes, not entirely successful treatment of the figure of Snape in book seven, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: “It is one of the rare places in an otherwise character-driven story where Rowling’s plot demands trumped a character’s action.”\textsuperscript{39} In fact critic Maria Nikolajeva, who has written a number of articles on Harry Potter, supports the character-driven view of the stories: “It is my conviction, shared by a number of critics and scholars that the attraction of the novels lies chiefly in the main character.”\textsuperscript{40} I strongly disagree with Prinzi and Nikolajeva and my thesis works from an assumption contrary to theirs: The stories are driven by the interplay between various binary oppositions which are of course mostly embodied by the characters. The characters in themselves,
INTRODUCTION: STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITY | 19

however, as individual as Rowling tries to depict them, represent themes and ideas which are at the root of the tales. Certainly readers identify with Harry Potter, but they do not do so because he is such a wonderful individual but because he is like them, because he embodies their joys, worries and anxieties and thus presents a projection foil. This thesis is therefore adverse in outlook to the many critical pieces that focus on character.

A volume similar in focus to Prinzi’s is Edmund M. Kern’s *The Wisdom of Harry Potter: What Our Favourite Hero Teaches Us about Moral Choices* published in 2003. Like me, Kern perceives the ambiguity of Rowling’s stories. However, he too works more on the level of characters and the story, while I try to expose how ambiguity shows itself in the structure and the interplay between binary oppositions. There are other scholars who have remarked upon or hinted at the ambiguity inherent in the novels. However, they usually focus on one particular instance of it while I try to draw attention to the way in which it is underlying the whole narrative. An example would be Patricia Donaher’s and James M. Okapal’s article “Causation, Prophetic Visions, and the Free Will Question in Harry Potter.” Donaher and Okapal comment the prophecies featuring in *Harry Potter* and the ambiguity they lend a narrative that otherwise clearly prefers choice.

Furthermore, Karin E. Westman discusses love and its ambiguous function in the books.

One person who needs to be mentioned with respect to *Harry Potter* is John Granger, a rather prolific and non-academic commentator on the phenomenon. Granger alternately views the novels as Christian, interprets them as following the alchemical process of creating a Philosopher’s Stone, and analyses them as

---

44 Cf. Donaher and Okapal 53.
While some of his ideas are intriguing, it is hard to take him entirely seriously academically, as he is, for instance, in the habit of using terms such as myth, postmodernism and poststructuralism without specifically defining them.\textsuperscript{49} Contrary to my opinion, Granger believes the texts to be postmodern and poststructuralist rather than structuralist. Rowling’s criticism of hegemonic institutions such as the government, the press, the legal and the educational system serve as justification for his viewpoint.\textsuperscript{50} He also analyses Rowling’s preoccupation with those on the fringes of society as postmodern.\textsuperscript{51} My thesis will show that although there is certainly an awareness of these kinds of themes on the part of Rowling, a greater awareness in fact than Lucas shows in his Star Wars movies, the books are finally structuralist. They provide escape from exactly the themes Granger identifies as postmodern because they finally push them to the margins again. Inequality, for instance, is not abolished at the end of the novels. In fact, many issues that resemble real life ones are rather indirectly treated so that the impression arises that they are shirked to give readers a break. In this sense, Granger and I clearly differ in viewpoint and approach.

A reading that is closer to mine in its position on structuralism and poststructuralism is Luisa Grijalva Maza’s in her article “Deconstructing the Grand Narratives in Harry Potter: Inclusion/Exclusion and Discriminatory Policies in Fiction and Practice.”\textsuperscript{52} Grijalva Maza sees the Potter novels as embodiment of the grand narrative of liberalism which in the novels as well as in real life often produces exclusion despite its professed openness and inclusiveness.\textsuperscript{53} Although she approaches the novels from a poststructuralist and not a structuralist viewpoint, she, like me, comes to the conclusion that for their popularity the stories finally depend on structures and their limitations despite their urge to question them. While the scope of her paper only allows her to look into one grand narrative, I will argue that the novels and the Star Wars movies discuss and negotiate several ideologies (grand narratives) that appear to be constitutive of the Western mindset. Vandana Saxena, too analyses the structuralist and poststructuralist potential of the novels and to my knowledge is the only one apart from myself who explicitly evokes Lévi-


\textsuperscript{49} Cf. for instance Granger on ‘grand myths’ in Unlocking Harry Potter 164.

\textsuperscript{50} Cf. Granger Unlocking Harry Potter 174-76.

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. Granger Unlocking Harry Potter 167-69.


\textsuperscript{53} Cf. Grijalva Maza 426.
Strauss’s structures of myth in connection with *Harry Potter*, albeit briefly.\(^5^4\) Her specific focus, however, lies more on “cultural conceptualizations of growth and boyhood (…)”\(^5^5\) and she explores particular features of the fantasy formula as well as the *Bildungsroman* and their “negotiation between subversion and containment (…)”.\(^5^6\)

A large amount of criticism on *Harry Potter* revolves around questions of ‘race,’ ethnicity and gender. There are several collections of articles that need to be mentioned in this respect. All of the following volumes contain essays on these topics also treated in my thesis: Lana A. Whited’s collection *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon* (2002),\(^5^7\) *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays* (2003),\(^5^8\) edited by Giselle Liza Anatol and the follow-up *Reading Harry Potter Again: New Critical Essays* (2009)\(^5^9\) as well as Elizabeth E. Heilman’s *Harry Potter’s World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives* (2003)\(^6^0\) and the consecutive *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter* (2009).\(^6^1\) It can be said that the contributors generally view the gender and ‘race’ questions in the novels more negatively in the volumes from 2002 and 2003, published before the *Harry Potter* series had actually been concluded. Examples of not entirely positive readings of, for instance, Hermione Granger and the house elves are Eliza T. Dresang’s article “Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender,”\(^6^2\) and Julia Park’s “Class and Socioeconomic Identity in Harry Potter’s England.”\(^6^3\) The

---

54  Cf. Saxena 35-37.
55  Saxena 166.
56  Saxena 25.
completion of the *Potter* series in 2007 has allowed more balanced approaches to these topics in volumes published after that date. Well-grounded discussions on gender include Ximena Gallardo C.’s and C. Jason Smith’s “Happily Ever After: Harry Potter and the Quest for the Domestic.”64 A good example of a thorough treatment of the house elves and the ‘race’ question is Brycchan Carey’s “Hermione and the House-Elves Revisited: J.K. Rowling, Antislavery Campaigning, and the Politics of Potter.”65 A further very recent and extremely insightful and well-researched collection that needs to be mentioned is Katrin Berndt’s and Lena Steveker’s *Heroism in the Harry Potter Series* (2011).66 The convincing articles of the two editors themselves must particularly be foregrounded. Steveker writes about Harry Potter’s identity formation67 and emphasises the “concept of unitary Selfhood” that the novels advocate, thereby hinting at the notion of mythical balance the structures propagate, without, however, explicitly linking the books with myth.68 Katrin Berndt has contributed what is in my opinion the most profound, thorough and all-encompassing essay about the role of Hermione Granger written so far.69 She analyses Hermione Granger as an individual and defends her against charges of anti-feminism from other critics. Although I still labour from the assumption that the characters are subordinated to the structures and to Harry’s quest, Berndt’s article makes clear how much Rowling tried to create individuals within the limited structural scope of the formulaic story she had at her disposal.

There is no substantial amount of research which treats both *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*, a rather surprising fact given the many similarities between the stories and the huge success that unites both. The only book I could find that

---


68  Steveker 77.

analyses both is Russel W. Dalton’s *Faith Journey through Fantasy Lands: A Christian Dialogue with Harry Potter, Star Wars, and The Lord of the Rings.*\(^{70}\) However, as the title suggests, it looks at the stories from a religious rather than a mythical or structural perspective. The exclusively Christian view of the tales which, for instance, Granger also propagates about *Harry Potter* is too narrow in my opinion, as there are countless ways of interpreting them quite free from any religious connotations. After all, there are a number of fans and followers of both *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* who would not call themselves religious. Of course I do not deny that the stories have a moral message in accordance with Christian beliefs but just as it does not do to make myths of them unquestioningly, they should not be exploited to prop up Christianity in decline. In addition to Dalton’s monograph, there are also a few internet publications which compare *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*, for instance the essay “‘The Chosen One:’ Prophecy, Destiny, and Free Will in *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*” by someone calling himself Matril.\(^{71}\) As the title says, Matril (rather briefly) looks at the treatment of free will and fate and identifies it as central for the messages of both tales. I try to go beyond Matril’s analysis in doing a close reading of especially Anakin Skywalker’s / Darth Vader’s development for which questions of fate, determination and choice are even more prominent than for Harry Potter’s. Michael Valdez Moses comments on the tension between tradition and (post)modernity but predominantly compares the *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* movies.\(^{72}\) Obviously, so far comments on and articles about both *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* are mainly to be found in online fan forums and internet journals and magazines.

In sum it can be said that much more research exists on *Harry Potter* than on *Star Wars* and almost none on the comparison of both phenomena. My work thus fills a gap when it comes to bringing the two stories together. The research on *Star Wars* was mentioned to be either rather uncritically informed by a Campbellian structural approach or by the perceived failings of George Lucas with respect to discourses of gender and ethnicity. For *Star Wars*, therefore my research builds a bridge between the older, mythical approaches and the more recent critical

---


postmodern ones as it shows how much the (Lévi-Straussian) mythical structures contribute to the stereotypical way in which female characters, ethnic minorities and aliens are treated. It also demonstrates that both stories heavily rely on their binary structures and cannot be conceived of without them. The structuralist approach not only exposes ideological failings it also teaches us much about the ways in which formulaic fiction works. When it comes to Harry Potter, academic writing is particularly focused on similar social questions as treated by recent Star Wars researchers and the majority of books and articles is very character-centred. As my thesis focuses on structure and the way characters embody and perpetuate it, it presents a perspective opposite to the one prevalent in critical circles.

I would like to conclude this introduction with two general, important points about my thesis. Firstly, though I am aware of the fact that I am comparing films (Star Wars) and novels (Harry Potter), the thesis will not put much emphasis on the intermedial differences as my approach is predominantly semiotic, highlighting the similarities of both tales with respect to their storylines, characters, and above all, structures. Secondly, I know that my chosen structural focus will be considered unusual given the fact that structuralist approaches which have tended to categorise, classify, put up hierarchies and exclude, are thought to be out-dated by many academics. Still, I believe it is impossible to dismiss something (in this case a structuralist viewpoint) without looking at it thoroughly before. No one can deny that both Star Wars and Harry Potter largely depend on their familiar structures for their appeal. Thus, what I have tried to do is to combine a thorough description and analysis of the two tales’ structures with a critique of them based on the hierarchies they establish. I believe that the approach I have chosen is highly profitable with respect to any kind of formulaic film or novel if one does not lose sight of the fact that structures provide comfort and security on the one hand but exclude and marginalise on the other. In short, structures, like myth, like Star Wars and Harry Potter, like the following treatise, are ambiguous.