

Speculative Fiction and Ethics
12th Annual Meeting of the Association for Research in the Fantastic (GFF)

Universität of Cologne / University of Bamberg (Online)

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Organizers: Judith Rauscher (C), Mareike Spychala (B), Sara Tewelde-Negassi (C), Lorena Bickert (B)

“Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive”

– Ursula K. Le Guin

Ever since Ursula K. Le Guin republished her SF classic *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) with an introduction in 1979, her emphasis on the descriptive, not extrapolative or even prophetic nature of speculative fiction has become an oft-repeated dictum. Speculative literature, according to Le Guin, does not describe what will be. Nor does it describe what is. Rather, it sets up “a thought experiment” that not only asks the question of who we are—whether as individuals, society, or humanity in general—but first and foremost who we could be, who we want to be, and in which ways our answers to these questions shape our everyday actions and decisions. These questions are also ones central to the field of philosophy and especially ethics as one of its sub-disciplines. In the academic field of “literature and ethics,” literary studies and ethics come together to examine, according to Michael Eskin, how texts and the narratives they contain interrogate “the moral potential” (560) of humans in society. For the 12th Annual Meeting of the Gesellschaft für Fantastikforschung (Association for Research in the Fantastic; GFF), we are looking for contributions that analyze how speculative literature and other speculative media interrogate and speak to personal, social, and political ethics; question the existence of universal moral values; and shed light on the specific contexts in and conditions under which individuals, groups, or societies act and make decisions.

Whether in classic speculative literature such as H.G Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (1897), Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915), J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), or Michael Ende’s *The NeverEnding Story* (1979); in *Star Trek* episodes such as “The Measure of a Man” (*TNG*, 1989) and “Death Wish” (*VOY*, 1996), or films such as Guillermo del Toro’s *El laberinto del fauno* (2006), and Jennifer Phang’s *Advantageous* (2015); whether in Comics like Enki Bilal’s *Le sommeil du monstre* (1998) and video games such as *The Last of Us* (2013), or in contemporary novels such as Cornelia Funke’s *Ink Heart* (2003), Analee Newitz’s *Autonomous* (2018), or N.K. Jemisin’s *The City We Became* (2020), questions of ethics are key. The same holds true for countless other narratives that fall under the rubric of the fantastic.

We invite contributions about all forms and genres of the fantastic and their engagements with questions of ethics, whether they focus on literature, comics, film, TV, music, video games, or live-action roleplay. In the *open track*, any paper dealing with the fantastic can be submitted. We especially welcome contributions on topics such as:

- Questions of and thought experiments concerning ethics and the fantastic
- Gender, race, class, sexuality as well as ecology and ethics in the fantastic, also from a transnational perspective
- Ethics and emotions as well as morality and affect in the fantastic
- Posthuman, queer, anti-racist, and de-colonial interventions and questions of ethics in speculative literature and speculative media
- Representations of alternative familial, communal, societal, and political structures and questions of ethics in the fantastic
- Representations of violence, war, sickness, death, or dying and ethics in the fantastic
- Interrogations of the ethical dimensions of technologization and scientific progress in speculative fiction and speculative media
- Discussions of the ethical dimensions of the production, distribution, and consumption of speculative literature and speculative media

Please send an **abstract (300 words in German or English)** as well as a short **biographical statement (150 words)** to Jun.-Prof. Dr. Judith Rauscher (University of Cologne) and Mareike Spychala, M.A. (University of Bamberg) by March 30, 2021 using the following e-mail address: gff-2021@uni-koeln.de