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The Process of Genre: Authors, Readers, Institutions

'Genre' is almost a dirty word among creative writers. It seems to imply something derivative rather than original, commercial rather than artistic, prescriptive rather than innovative. These perspectives, however, can be called into question by recognising that genres are not static, ahistorical categories. Rather, genres are processes. They are formed, negotiated and reformed, both tacitly and explicitly, by the interactions of authors, readers and (importantly) institutions. At work in any genre are regimes of verisimilitude: loose rules of plausibility and probability which mean that certain generic elements are *expected* and therefore indispensible if a genre is to be recognisable (to authors, readers, institutions) *at specific times*. To demonstrate my point, I will be using the example of how my novel *Giants of the Frost* (2004) was positioned and re-positioned in terms of genre: via my own intentions, via reader reception and via institutional influences (e.g. the university, my publishers, the media, booksellers). The novel draws on Scandinavian mythology, a source which is heavily associated with the fantasy fiction genre. How this genre, against my intentions, made a claim on *Giants of the Frost* demonstrates the power of verisimilitude, and the processual nature of genre formation.

The Bulgarian structuralist, Tzvetan Todorov, holds that genres are not fixed and ahistorical categories, nor are they necessarily constricting. Genres are merely 'relay points by which the work assumes a relation with the universe of literature' (Todorov 1973: 8), and rather than a necessity that 'a work faithfully incarnates its genre, there is only a probability that it will do so' (Todorov 1973: 22). Todorov's emphasis here is significant, not only because it introduces the idea that genres are fluid. By speaking of probability, he invites us to consider for whom that probability exists: he is starting to decentre the text as the determiner of genre, and gesture towards reader expectation. His schematisation of the fantasic, also points in this direction. At the root of the fantastic is the concept of hermeneutic ambiguity. The 'pure fantastic', as Todorov calls it, engenders hesitation, for both character and reader, between natural and supernatural explanations (Todorov 1973: 33). It is significant that the fantastic is viewed as an experience rather than a concrete set of elements: the interaction between the reader and the text (the ambiguity of interpretation) is part of the process.

In this way, Todorov introduces the role of interaction, specifically reader reception, to the theory of genre. In keeping with this interest in reader reception and expectation, he develops the classical rhetorical idea of verisimilitude. Rather than a 'naïve' definition, where verisimilitude simply means 'consistent with reality', Todorov favours a more complex definition: it is 'a relation not with reality (as is truth) but with what most

people believe to be reality - in other words, public opinion' (Todorov 1977: 82). Each genre is structured by its own regimes of verisimilitude, which are consistent with what is commonly held to be true for that genre at that time. Verisimilitude, therefore, operates at the levels of *plausibility* and *probability*. Take Todorov's category of the marvellous, for example, as it accords so neatly with fantasy fiction. In this genre, supernatural agency (magic) is accepted by the characters and the readers. It is therefore plausible for characters to practise magic. Moreover, it is probable that, at some stage in the text, magic will be practised: it is too significant a rule to go unused.

Jonathan Culler wrote in detail about verisimilitude (or 'vraisemblance', as he called it) in his book *Structuralist Poetics* (1975). He identified five levels of verisimilitude, but the one which most concerns this argument is 'generic verisimilitude', in which plausibility and probability are derived from 'the norms of a group of works' (Culler 1975: 145) or genres. For example, in a vampire novel it is perfectly plausible for a character to return from the dead, and probable that he will then go on to seek out blood to drink; in a novel of literary realism neither action is plausible or probable. Fantasy fiction relies heavily on generic verisimilitude, precisely because so much of its content centres around what is 'not real'. The regimes of verisimilitude at work in fantasy fiction must account for these 'not real' factors in a way which provides internal consistency. So, dragons can exist, but if they can't breathe fire on page five, then they shouldn't breathe fire on page 500.

More than that, regimes of verisimilitude give genres their distinctive qualities. They signal the genre to the reader, then they fulfil the expectations of the reader. There is a particular kind of verisimilitude which I have identified in fantasy fiction. European history, geography and mythology is central to it. Otherworlds often feature maps where north is marked by ice and snow, where settings are dotted with medieval castles, where feudal society still holds sway. Mythological creatures owe much to Celtic and northern European mythology and folktales. Magical practices often hark back to pre-Christian Northern Europe, while fantasy fiction wizards rework the figure of the Celtic druid, or the European Renaissance magician. In this genre, the supernatural (the singular defining marker of the fantastic) is mobilized in a uniquely European context. I have chosen to call this 'magic-tower verisimilitude': the recurring imbrication of the supernatural (hence, magic) and the European (hence its iconic architectural feature, the tower). It is probably the clearest marker of fantasy fiction, and created problems in the classification my own non-fantasy novel, as I will show below.

Verisimilitude alerts us to the fact that plausibility and probability cannot be inherent in texts. The former relies on reader reception, the latter on reader expectations. Hans Robert Jauss, a German critic from the *Rezepionästhetik* school of theory, stresses that readers are never passive, but possess 'history-making energy' (Jauss 1970: 8). In his book *Toward An Aesthetic Of Reception* (1982), he develops his concept of a 'horizon of expectations'. Jauss makes two key moves with this concept. First, he explicitly states that expectations always structure readings. Second, by using the term 'horizon' he suggests that these expectations surround readers, but are not fixed: they move as readers move. Hence, the reader's relationship with texts is a productive one, not a passive one; and genres are changing all the time. This is Jauss's other key emphasis: the importance of studying genre diachronically. Reception takes place within a historically-specific situation. Jauss borrows from Kant's theory of

aesthetic judgement, which suggests that judgements about art can never be objective but must always be exemplary because 'the category of the exemplary…makes possible a processlike determination' (Jauss 1982: 80) of artistic merit. Likewise, process is situated at the heart of the concept of genre. If we accept Jauss's definition that texts are not 'facts' but 'events' (Jauss 1970: 24), we restore to them their ongoing mutability of meaning across time. Facts (the objective) are descriptive, where events (the exemplary) partake in a process. While Todorov shows that genres are not given categories but interactions between text and reader, Jauss reminds us that these interactions are always changing, that genre itself is formed over time.

Todorov, Jauss and Culler all decentre the text (and by implication, I think, author intention) as the determiner of genre, and introduce the idea that genres are formed in relation to reader reception and expectation. These ideas have gained a lot of currency in the study of literary genres. However none of these theorists has discussed (at least not explicitly) the role of institutions in the process of genre. So now I turn briefly from the field of literary studies, to the field of film and television studies where a great deal of useful work on genre is being done. Two theorists in particular, Steve Neale from film studies, and Jason Mittell from television studies, have produced clear and useful accounts of genre formation and the importance of factors beyond the author and the reader.

Neale and Mittell foreground the idea that genre is a process, and reject the notion that genre inheres in texts. They take these ideas one step further than Jauss, however, by locating the formation of genre not in the private space of the author or the reader, but largely in the public space of institutions. Mittell stresses that genres are formed in the actions and reactions of the industry ('production, distribution, promotion, exhibition, criticism') as well as in the actions and reactions of audiences (Mittell 2004: 8-10). Neale and Mittell offer the central position in genre analysis to institutional discourses (Neale 1995: 166, Mittell 2004: 8) precisely because they are public discourses. The individual audience member may have his or her 'individualised, idiosyncratic classifications', but largely, horizons of expectations are formed in the public sphere (Neale 1995: 166). We know that these expectations and the knowledge they embody are necessarily public because they are what attract audiences to texts, they are the reasons why the individual audience member chooses *this* text rather than *that* text.

I have been careful so far to avoid terminology which marries these theories of genre specifically to film and television, in order to open the possibility that they can be applied equally usefully to studying literary genres. However, it is important to note that there are differences between film texts and literary texts, and the differences that concern this argument centre around the significance of the author. Put simply, authors of texts are not as prominent in film and television. To a large extent in the film industry, and almost without exception in the television industry, authorship is dispersed; while in the field of literature it is usually specific. The notion of publicness which Neale insists upon is arguably not so marked in literature at the site of a text's creation. In the case of film, texts may be influenced from their earliest stages by industrial factors such as studio priorities or the availability of special effects technology. In the case of literature, *publication* comes after a full manuscript has been composed, to a large extent in *private*. But this notion of private composition does not necessarily and wholly apply to a text by a previously published author, or a text which is contracted before it is written, or a text which is part of an

academic degree in creative writing. As more professional and published authors come to and emerge from creative writing programs, this issue can perhaps be examined a little closer.

Giants of the Frost, as well as being my sixth novel for adults and written under contract, is part of a doctoral research degree in creative writing. Guidelines for such degrees at Australian universities often invoke the concept of genre: the creative project should be 'a book-length work in its genre' (University of Adelaide 2005) or 'a substantial piece of work in its genre' (University of Queensland 2005). It may be required to 'make a significant original contribution to the genre within which it is written' (University of Queensland 2005) or its accompanying critical exegesis may be required to address a 'definition and analysis of the genre including the place of the Major Work in the genre' (University of Adelaide 2005). All of these requirements are predicated on the idea that its genre is knowable enough to decide what constitutes a substantial example.

It is important to acknowledge that the term 'genre' may be used on these university websites in a formal sense, that is, to connote poetry or prose, fiction or non-fiction. But certainly the category of 'prose', for example, is not sufficiently precise to propose or defend a research project. In fact genre in the more specific sense is one of the ways in which students are encouraged to rationalise their projects. The literature review, for example, is required to explain the creative project's 'relation to existing literature in the field' (University of Melbourne, 2005). In fulfilling this requirement, a student writing a work of, say, experimental fiction would not discuss current trends in romance fiction. Rather, he or she would choose other works of experimental fiction as a way of positioning his or her work in the field. Genre, then is inscribed in the research process of creative writing higher degrees, but only insofar as it is a function of author intention, embodied in that mainstay of academic opening lines: 'In this dissertation, I will…' Certainly, my own thesis prospectus refers to genre directly: the creative project 'blends a number of genres…gothic and historical fiction.' My intention in this regard, however, was not enough to determine the genre.

I am not suggesting that the author is dead. I believe, however, that it is more productive to understand the author as a 'real, material person' but in 'a "decentred" way' (Dyer 2002: 32). The following account demonstrates how my intentions regarding genre were 'decentred' by various institutional factors. Not just to show that there were negotiations and renegotiations over what genre *Giants* is, but also that there are continual negotiations and renegotiations over which elements (in specific moments) constitute which genres.

First, I turn to the university as an instituion. Frankly, writing popular fiction is not always considered the most respectable of projects. Certainly, in terms of writing popular fiction as part of a research higher degree, there is an implicit burden that the writer can legitimate the project in a scholarly way. Sometimes justifications are required against more explicit criticism. Judy Wilson, for example, has likened literary fiction to 'craft' and popular fiction to 'production line work.' Popular fiction is nothing more than 'words poured into a mold' and it has no place in a university creative writing course (Wilson 2003: 87). I decided on *Giants* as an appropriate doctoral creative project for one compelling reason: Old Norse mythology and literature (the text's most significant source material) are taught within English departments.

As an undergraduate I read many of the texts which became significant to the development of *Giants*. For example, in *The Prose Edda* (1954), Snorri Sturluson's retelling of the key Norse myths, I first learned of Vidar, the son of Odin. He is 'the silent god' (Sturluson 1954: 55) and features little in the mythological stories, compared to such high-profile figures as Loki or Thor. However, Vidar's role at Ragnarok is vital. When Odin is swallowed by Fenrir the wolf, it is Vidar who 'will stride forward…take the wolf's upper jaw in one hand and tear his throat asunder' (Sturluson 1954: 88). That such an important function should be the responsibility of such an under-written character is the stuff of novelists' dreams: one need only ask, 'What if he doesn't want to avenge his father at Ragnarok? What if he doesn't like his father? What if he falls in love with a mortal woman?' The rest proceeds from there. Another example of a text, read at university level, which influenced the creative project is *Njal's Saga*, an epic tale of the unstoppable cycle of violence proceeding from a blood-feud in medieval Iceland. The text features strongly themes of family and of fate, particularly how one's family may, in part, determine one's fate. Hrut Herjolfsson identifies the inescapability of fate when he says, 'each must do as destiny decides' (Magnusson & Pálsson 1960: 49), yet it is the concept of family honour which influences what shape that destiny will take. When Flosi Thordarson incites the burning of Njal's home and family, he acknowledges that his (and the other Burners') fate will now be shaped by the blood-feud: 'this Burning will have such consequences that many of us will lie lifeless' (Magnusson & Pálsson 1960: 270). Fate is not wholly arbitrary in *Njal's Saga*, it is in some ways determined at the site of family, a very important theme in *Giants*.

Beyond sources for primary ideas, medieval studies, through its recent recasting as medievalism, provided a number of benefits to the project. Medievalism, according to Stephanie Trigg, is 'the study of the reception of medieval culture' (Trigg 2005). It is a field which bridges the divide between the popular culture of the mass market and the elite culture of the academy, precisely the divide which my creative project must bridge to be acceptably classed as univeristy-appropriate research. Theories of medievalism see modernity as the point where mass culture and elite culture were distinguished from one another. Before modernity, the medieval period was both a period of 'less cultural exclusivity', therefore more capable of intersecting with current popular culture (for example, the 'pilgrimage' to Graceland; the 'hallowed turf' and 'holy grails' of sporting matches; or the reliquary significance accorded to celebrity mementoes); and a period before the 'mechanisation of mass culture', therefore providing a model of non-commerciality which appeals to elite culture (for example, the idea of art as a magnification of the transcendent) (Weisl 2003: 10-11). Medievalism, therefore, can provide a common source of inspiration or admiration for both popular and elite cultures. By rooting my creative project in Old Norse source material, it could partake in medievalism. In some ways, knowledge of this theory allowed me to develop subtly themes of the medieval past signifying in the present. In other, perhaps more practical ways, it provided me a first line of defence in the battle for scholarly legitimation

It became clear very early in the composition process, though, that the source material, chosen partly to legitimate a popular fiction creative project within the university, was ironically going to result in the text tending much more towards fantasy fiction than I had planned. Old Norse mythology strongly invokes magic-tower verisimilitude: one does not flirt lightly with the Aesir. My first problem was the names of mythological individuals and creatures. Many of these names are already laden with

significance in our culture. Odin, Loki and Thor are well accounted for in the Western imagination (and sometimes in the non-Western imagination). For example, Odin appears as Wotan in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and turns up as Mr Wednesday in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. Loki appears in Matthew Arnold's poem 'Balder Dead', is an evil god in the computer game *Age Of Mythology*, and adopts the form of a laid-back Japanese teenager in Sakura Kinoshita's manga comic *Mythical Detective Loki Ragnarok*. Thor gave his name to Thursday, and was the hero of the Marvel Comics series *The Mighty Thor*. These characters came to me with, for want of a better term, a lot of cultural baggage.

My methodology in transforming these characters from their original representations in Snorri or the eddic poems, while also finding a point of difference from subsequent representations, lay again in my academic background. Materialist theories like cultural materialism or new historicism, for example, emphasise primary material culture and the liberation of silenced or marginalised voices. These theories remind us that historical events are experienced by individuals in a material way on real bodies and minds. This perspective, a key methodology for historical fiction, led me in two directions. First, I decided that the best way to describe an over-represented figure like Loki or Thor was through the viewpoint of someone much less socially powerful (for example, Aud, who is female, servile, and unable to use her own magic powers); and the best way to describe Odin (the All-Father) was through the viewpoint of his son, Vidar, who hates and fears him. Second, I aimed for a method of representation which would emphasise the specific over the numinous. This emphasis was developed in three subtly different ways. I aimed to provide explanations for mythological stories which would make them seem more like history than mythology. For example, Snorri writes that Odin's horse Sleipnir 'has eight legs' (Sturluson 1954: 43). In *Giants* he has four but is 'twice as fast as any horse known to the Aesir' (Wilkins 2004: 293). I also acknowledged a historical context for the mythology and turned to information about life in eleventh-century Scandinavia to set my scenes, rather than on the descriptions in the source material itself. For example, the Aesir family compound, Valaskjálf, is not a mystical temple of silver as it is in *Grímnismál*, but a hulking tenth-century Scandinavian hall:

> Stepping across the threshold felt like stepping into the belly of a whale: dark and cavernous and swollen, the smell of sea and blood. Lanterns lined the walls, illuminating the spaces between the carved beams… Vidar's eyes were drawn upwards to the ceiling. The silver tiles gleamed dully in the firelight. (Wilkins 2004: 210-11)

Finally, I imagined not the Aesir in their golden age, but how they might really be now, a thousand years on when their civilisation had declined with the coming of a new religion. Once,

> every man in this part of Midgard had a story on his lips of us. Then, spreading from the warm parts of the world and moving up slowly through the rain and snow, came the word of the man we called Hvítakristr: the White Christ. (Wilkins 2004: 263)

This demoralising fate allowed me to depict Odin as a drunken wreck with a filthy beard and clothes that stink of alcohol; Thor as a fat bully who hits

women; and Loki, the wily thief, in possession of dozens of modern objects stolen from Kirkja weather station.

Some of the names, however, were not problematic due to a history of over-representation. Rather they troubled me simply because they sounded silly or clichéd or both. I have long found distasteful the penchant many fantasy-fiction authors have for inventing names which lend a patina of exoticism without any real thought to how these names might be philologically or geographically related to each other: names like Tarmon Gai'don, Khyber Edessedil, or Jarka Russ. Some of the names I used with trepidation in *Giants* included Garmr, the dog who guards Hel in the eddic poem *Baldrs Draumar*; Jarnvidja, the 'old one in the iron wood' from *Völuspá* who raises Fenrir the wolf ; or Módgud, the giantess whom I borrowed from Snorri to guard the river Slíd. Some names were so strongly magic-tower that I chose to leave them out altogether (Yggsdrasill, for example, which is the mythological name for the World Tree) or change them subtly (Verdandi of the Three Norns, for example, whose name I shortened to Verda). Some names were beautiful and powerful enough to appeal to me, though they still connoted magic-tower verisimilitude very strongly: Vidar's and Thor's horses, for example, Arvak (early waker) and Tanngrísnir (snarl-tooth). Even though both these names were used differently in the source material from how I used them, the contrast between the two names and their almost onomatapoeic qualities appealed to me greatly.

Beyond this, I had to coin a number of names myself. In the source material, all the horses and swords have names. Famous swords abound in the sagas, for example Grásítha (grey-sides) and Gunnlogi (flame of battle) in *Gísla's Saga*. I wanted Vidar's sword name to connote ironically violence and love, so I named it Hjarta-bítr, or the heart-biter. In Snorri, Odin's horse is Sleipnir (slippy), and the other gods' horses have names like Gyllir (golden), Skeidbrimir (surf rider) and Silfrtopp (silvertop). I named Loki's horse Heror, which translates to war-arrow. But such clever uses of Old Norse led me astray when I was researching a name for the horse which throws Aud's son (a key subplot: a child is thrown from a horse and terrible decisions have to be made). My intention was to use the word for trusty or reliable, thus adding a level of irony to the tragic scene. Unfortunately, the Old Norse word for trusty is Tryggr.

The next significant institutional influence in the process was the publishing company. My Australian publishers had little to do with the composition, and the editing proceeded smoothly. It was just before the page-proof stage that doubts began to arise about how to position the text in terms of genre. The cover, I was told, had to be 'right', it had to hail the 'right' audience. Recent covers of texts by other, more successful, authors were brandished in the ensuing debate: Sarah Zettel's (fantasy fiction), Tobsha Lerner's (erotic fiction), Phillipa Gregory's (historical fiction), Belinda Alexandra's (romance saga fiction). The result was a tawny-haired woman, both modern and medieval, staring out from a blue background of bare trees and frosty sky, reminiscent perhaps of a Jean M. Auel novel, part-fantasy and part-historical. It is interesting to note that forthcoming international versions of the book foreground different generic features. The UK edition features a viking ship, evoking historical fiction; the US edition features a windswept beach with a lonely female figure, evoking romance fiction.

Shortly after cover design had been finalised in Australia, doubts were sounded by the publishers about the title of the text. '*Giants*' was thought

too masculine a word. It was decided that the text needed a more female-friendly title, something that might connote the romance element more definitively. Some of the suggested replacement titles included 'Beloved Of The Frost,' 'The Frost Prince,' and 'The Summer Frost'. In the end, practical matters intervened. Forward marketing and promotional material had already gone out. The title stayed the same and soon after *Giants of the Frost* was published.

Next in the chain of instituional influence was the media and the booksellers. The critical reception has been surprisingly positive and diverse. However, reviews differ in how they categorise the text in terms of genre. The *Advertiser* identifies it as 'fantasy' (Lloyd 2004: 9), the *Courier Mail* as 'dark romance' (Sorensen 2004: 6), and the *Canberra Times* as horror (Steele 2004: 19). In some cases, a vein of unease about genre is apparent. *Visions* refers to the book as 'a supernatural love story' but the reviewer notes with disappointment it is not as 'spine chilling' as my earlier work, thus positioning it also within the gothic (Thompson 2004). *Australian Bookseller and Publisher* also suggests it would disappoint a gothic audience, and it is not 'standard genre fantasy'. Rather, 'the strength of the novel lies in the love story' (Whitney 2004: 28). Some reviewers are comfortable situating the text as a generic hybrid. The *Australian Women's Weekly* identifies it as 'mystery, romance and fabulous fantasy' (George 2004: 266) while the *Age* identifies it as a 'supernatural-romance-cum-dark-fantasy novel with lashings of brooding Norse mythology' (Woodhead 2004: 4). The *West Australian* says that too many traditions 'are laid uneasily over one another' and 'the result jars' (Luckett 2004: 8). This positioning and repositioning of my text is part of wider negotiations by the media about which features constitute which genres, an important practical consideration when looking for publicity angles or assigning texts to reviewers.

When the Aurealis Awards shortlists were announced in December 2004, *Giants* was listed in both the horror and fantasy categories. Each category's shortlist is decided upon by a different panel, and each provides a justification for how they arrive at their particular shortlist. Interestingly, both panels identify the mythology as the aspect of *Giants* which lends to it its genre: for the horror panel, the 'mythological horrors' and for the fantasy panel, the 'Norse fantasy' (Aurealis Awards 2005). The double shortlisting resulted in two distinct attitudes. In the first view, I was applauded for being able to write across genres. For example, it was the major reason offered for my shortlisting for the Peter McNamara award, an award which honours an individual's achievement in the field of Australian SF. In the second view, it was puzzling. For example, the Matilda web-log called it 'a bit of a problem' because a text should be either 'one or the other' (Middlemiss 2005).

However, it was at the point of sale where *Giants* was overwhelmingly assigned to a genre. Before its release, it was selected by the Doubleday Quest Bookclub as Editor's Choice. This subscription bookclub specialises in fantasy fiction, and the editor's choice is typically the default text which is sent to the one thousand or so subscribers. *Giants* was presumed here to be not only sufficiently fantasy-like to advertise alongside Ian Irvine and Terry Brooks, but sufficiently fantasy-like to satisfy the expectations of hundreds of dedicated readers. After its release, I found the text, almost without exception, in the fantasy fiction sections of multi-chain bookstores such as Angus and Robertson or Dymocks. Smaller booksellers were more likely to hedge their bets by placing a few in the fantasy section and others

in the general fiction section. But in all, *Giants* was predominantly positioned as fantasy fiction.

I want to remain mindful of the role of the reader in genre too. It is difficult to quantify, of course, how readers position texts in terms of genre, but certain conclusions can be drawn from correspondence directed to me or my online community. While hardly any of this correspondence mentions the fantasy-fiction elements of the text, numerous readers expressed disappointment in the unhappy ending which I conceived for Vidar and Victoria:

> I just finished reading *Giants of the Frost*…so very sad. I don't think I could bear to read the next title you release if it's going to have that same kind of ending… Life is sad enough, I think, without adding even more hopelessness to it. (Hamilton 2004)

This disappointment would indicate that the text was being read as romance fiction, with an expectation of lovers united. In all, eighty-five per cent of the correspondence I received about *Giants* mentioned the ending; not always complaining about it, but noting its unhappiness all the same. It is impossible, of course, to draw anything other than an anecdotal conclusion from reader correspondence: one only hears from those moved to write, and perhaps the unhappy ending provided the impetus for a certain type of reader to express her disappointment.

I cannot claim complete surprise that the romance fiction genre has made an appearance in the reception of this text. The first line of *Giants* is: 'This is my story and it's a love story' (Wilkins 2004: 5). No matter that this first line was intended as a counterpoint for the ironic denial of love at the end; I wrote the line, I own some responsibility. But I had assumed all along that fantasy fiction was the genre this text might slip into. My accompanying critical exegesis, throughout its planning, research and composition, has been predicated on the probability that *Giants* may be identified as fantasy fiction. The romance fiction angle, a late addition to my argument, has crept up on me in two recent events.

At the beginning of this year, I received correspondence from my editor in the United States. Thus far, editorial intervention into my US publications had been limited to Americanisation of spelling and idiom (windshield for windscreen, faucet for tap, and so on). This e-mail, however, was about a far more significant change to the manuscript of *Giants of the Frost*. Would I consider changing the ending? The publisher was concerned that readers would be so disappointed by my unhappy ending, that they would not recommend it to friends, nor buy anything else of mine subsequently.

Clearly, the US publisher are positioning this text as predominantly romance fiction. The unhappy ending, though perfect for a Norse saga, is not appropriate for a romance (not a contemporary romance in any case, though my editor noted that she 'never really liked Romeo and Juliet anyway'). I considered the request for the new ending, took advice from my agent, family, friends, and decided that it could not hurt. The 'real' version was already published in Australia and was forthcoming in the United Kingdom, so I chose to see the new US ending as something like a translation into a local idiom. I wrote the new ending, I even liked it a little. It is, however, apparent to me that the ending is not really a good fit for the rest of the story, which expends a lot of energy foreshadowing the

inescapability of fate. My editor disagreed, as did the copy-editor who wrote 'Bravo' in large red letters on the last page of the edited manuscript.

The second event occurred shortly after I had finished the first draft of the exegesis. My publishers were notified that *Giants of the Frost* had been shortlisted for a Ruby award. This award is presented annually for Australia's 'romantic book of the year'. The judging panel is made up of romance readers, that is, not critics, publishers, professional writers or public intellectuals of any kind. My publishers immediately withdrew the book from the shortlist, citing the marketing problems the romance-fiction shortlisting would create for my subsequent publications. In this example, the precise point I am making about genre is demonstrated. The process is negotiated between the author (who wrote: 'This is… a love story'); the readers (who sat on the Ruby judging panel), but perhaps most importantly the institution (the publisher who vetoed the assignment of *Giants* to the romance genre in Australia). Borrowing from Jauss, we can see that *Giants of the Frost* is an 'event' around which genres like romance fiction and fantasy fiction are defined and redefined, in a continuing process, at specific cultural moments.

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