Narrative Attraction:

One Story, One Reader and Two Decades of Ongoing Appeal

Warren Maynes and Margaret Mackey

University of Alberta

> *His wellbeing appears to need spectral entities to oppose it, figures of his*
>
> *own invention whom he can defeat.*
>
> McEwan, *Saturday*, 2005, 78

Margaret:

Imaginative commitment is an active energizer of our mental economy, but our understanding of how that process works is amorphous and cloudy. What is it that "captures" one person's imagination while leaving another cold? What matrix of memories, desires, terrors and needs finds expression in a particular story or even in a particular turning point of a story, so that this story plays a significant role in the shaping of someone's ways of responding to the world?

This article will explore the ramifications of these questions through the lens of one young man's ongoing response to a single story, told through multiplying media. The story is *Highlander*, which first appeared as a movie in 1986 and has been retold and expanded through a variety of vehicles: novelizations, sequel movies, a lengthy television series, a card game, and so forth. The fan is Warren Maynes, a recent graduate of the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta, who made a class presentation on the subject of *Highlander* and its ongoing hold on his own imagination for nearly twenty years. I was the instructor of that class and I was intrigued at his insider perspective on questions of narrative fascination and connection that are often completely opaque to outsiders.

We agreed to work further on this topic. What follows is an account of our separate and joint reflections on the story of *Highlander* and its sequels and spinoffs.

Highlander: The Original Movie

A review of one of the late sequels captures the appeal of the first movie, the original telling of the *Highlander* story:

> What made [*Highlander*] different from many of the other action/fantasy genre movies that came out through the 70s and 80s was that it created a mythology that was coherent, mysterious, and romantic. It was also a mythology that was presented in a "real world" setting which gave it a kind of tangibility that people could latch onto, much like the mythology created by the early seasons of the X-Files. The idea that immortals roamed the Earth, keeping their true natures hidden, battling with swords in a great Game for a mysterious Prize that would be

Warrne Maynes, Margaret Mackey

awarded to the last surviving immortal was compelling. *Highlander* offered us a

rich story that seamlessly tied the past and present together with humor, tragedy,

heroics and panache. (Isi, Forihash & Fuernsinn, 2000, n.p.)

The movie tells the story of contemporary antagonists who challenge and fight each other

with swords. Viewers of the film are led to deduce the rules governing these battles.

Warren's summary of these rules sums up the essence of the encounters:

- You cannot die unless you are decapitated in some way.

- If you kill another Immortal you absorb his "Quickening." This is variously
  described as his strength, memories, talents, and power.

- If Immortals are within about 30 feet of each other, then they can sense each
  other's presence.

- You may not kill on holy ground; ergo, this is the only place Immortals do not
  have to worry about other Immortals.

- Once a duel has begun, no one may interfere. The fight must be one on one.

- In the end there can be only one. The final surviving Immortal will gain "The
  Prize." This is an unknown quantity (if you ignore the final five minutes of the
  first film). It is generally agreed to be enough power to rule the world or
  something like that. [i]

So much for the movie; what of the teenager who first saw it in 1987? Warren takes up

the story, with a rich description of the winding path that led him to *Highlander* fandom.

Warren:

I was born in 1973 and my earliest memory is from 1977. My father took me along on my older brother's birthday outing to see *Star Wars: A New Hope*. By all accounts, I returned repeating the majority of the dialogue and all the sound effects verbatim. While I did some running after phantasms in white armour and shooting them down without compunction in the years that followed, most of these bad guys met their end at the edge of my gleaming light sabre. When the inevitable wave of small plastic figures ensued, those gifted with small plastic blades received pride of place.

The year following brought the earliest reading experience that I can now recall. Not a sword or space ship in sight this time as I read and re-read a pocketbook-size reprint of Spiderman's first six appearances from the early 1960s. This experience sparked a love affair with the medium of comic books.

So, when I stumbled upon a comic featuring a character with a sword it was a natural fit. That character was Conan the Barbarian. His illustrated exploits became my religion for years afterward and over the next decade I acquired over a thousand comics and books about him.

With the exception of a few adaptations of the original stories, all of these works were pastiches designed to fill the gaps in his life story. The caption in the comic's opening page declaring the work to be based on or adapted from the work of a Robert E. Howard intrigued me. A quick trip to the library and a helping hand from a librarian led me to the

paperback spinners and the most recent paperback reprinting of Howard's work. While these were laced with more pastiche short stories, they still fired my imagination. I found that the prose opened hitherto unnoticed doors in my imagination. Having seen hundreds of graphic representations of Conan in action, I had imagined countless more. I had internalized the world and concepts and could conjure mental images better than those from the printed page, not that this stopped me reading and enjoying the comics.

This quick tracing of the comic's origins to short stories written in the antiquity only a shade closer to my own time than the twelve millennia ago era of Conan – the 1930s – probably accounts for my creative energies being driven into writing rather than drawing. I am a dismal visual artist and have somehow always known it (though I painfully remind myself every few years). So stories of blood and thunder began to flow from my pen.

I continued to love swords and sword fights, or the imaginary aesthetic. It was not until my early teens that I acquired my own sword and experienced sword fighting as nearly as I could through fencing. It seemed to me at the time that being in a duel would be the only time that everything could be clear; the only time that the million things (girls, school, chores, girls) in my head at the time would not be competing for attention. It would simply be life or death. It would be a time when clear thought could be achieved. I learned later that what I was trying then to articulate more closely approximated some Zen ideas of no thought rather than clearer thought. The concept of having my fate in my own hands was also a powerful element in my dream of duelling. Such a state was very

desirable to an introverted pubescent boy. Swords were a symbol to me of this ultimate independence of spirit and body.

The films and books and comics that fed my fantasies all took place in *other worlds* full of spaceships and /or magic. At least this was the case until 1987.

That was the year when I first chose the film *Highlander* from the staff selection section in a now defunct video rental store. I vaguely remember seeing commercials for it a year or so before, but a solo journey to the cinema was beyond my reach at 13.

Watching the show was a revelation. Here was a duel in a modern setting! And then the Quickening! I knew almost instinctively what was going on there. I was immediately enthralled by the concept of Immortals. Here were people fighting not only to live, but to live *forever*.

Death had not yet touched my life in a concrete way at that point but it figured large in my nightmares. Growing up in North America during the early eighties meant being bombarded constantly by Cold War rhetoric and knowledge that the power to destroy the world was at the fingertips of people that I was led to believe were little better than ravening dogs. Perhaps I was of a delicate nature, but I lost many hours of sleep waiting for the shriek of ICBMs (inter-continental ballistic missiles). After seeing the start of the British film *Threads*, horror of surviving outweighed my fear of instant eradication.

But… maybe, just maybe, I was Immortal. This was a fantasy that I could get behind! It offered the ultimate escape from the quotidian cancer stats, rise of AIDS, and ever imminent nuclear fire. As an Immortal my only real concern would be meeting someone better with a sword than I was.

From then on my stick swinging shadow duels always ended with a muscle-convulsing, silent-screaming Quickening, the moment at which the victor absorbs all the power of the defeated Immortal. I renewed my fencing training with a passion. As I travelled about the city I was always on the look out for good sword fight locations; after all as an Immortal you could have to defend yourself anytime, anywhere. How would I react to an attack here? This question and its various answers became a constant refrain. My preoccupation evolved into a running battle that occupied my thoughts most of the time. In 1991 I explicitly realized that I had some kind of martial sequence going on in my imagination at least 75% of the time that I was awake.

Margaret:

Warren's retrospective look at the texts that positioned him to be maximally receptive to *Highlander* when he first encountered it provides a level of detail about an individual reader to which teachers and librarians seldom have access. The route by which a reader develops in one direction or another probably often resembles this mix of driving passion and pure serendipity. What makes one story strike home when another is of only fleeting interest is a complex question.

There is a modest literature on the idea of "story attachment" in the lives of small children (Alexander, Miller & Hengst, 2001; Bettelheim, 1977; White, 1954; Wolf & Heath, 1992), exploring some children's consuming need for constant reiteration of the same beloved story. I have been able to locate much less research concerning this kind of fervent fictional identification during adolescence. The literature on fandom is certainly germane, but overall it tends to investigate more public manifestations of commitment than Warren's private and imaginary sword fights.

In Warren's case, he developed an enthusiasm for reading about swordplay in the context of science fiction and the faux-history of Conan the Barbarian. His experience of Conan also gave him the taste of a passion for collecting, for world expansion, and for aiming at completion – all ingredients that would come into play in his experience of *Highlander*.

Experiencing the Story

The opening of the first film involves a sword fight in a contemporary parking lot, and viewers must assemble some rough understanding of the rules in order to make any sense of the story at all. The intellectual challenge to fill in the gaps is part of the appeal, and it is a challenge that clearly appealed to the adolescent Warren. His success in putting the plot together was a potent element in his ongoing relationship with the story. Probably even more significant was the "replay" potential of the sword fights – his ongoing mental combat could be infinitely reshaped.

There is a developing literature about narrative and gaming. Experts differ on whether or not a game is actually a vehicle for telling a story (e.g., Juul, 2001; Walther, 2003). My own views on this theme are evolving, but Warren's experience suggests that there is a continuum. It seems very clear that he is extracting the game components *out of* the story, with his reiterated imaginative focus on the rules and the duels.

Juul presents a table of narrative-game distinctions that fits almost uncannily and certainly instructively when overlaid on Warren's account of his ongoing mental duels extracted out of the ongoing linear story of the movie.

A Table of Narrative-game Ttranslations

Movies/Novels etc.	Game
Existent	Existent *or* Continuous production of existents (i.e., hordes of opponents)
Event	Event (cut-scene) *or* Simulation with multiple outcomes
Sequence of events	Selected events as events or simulations *or* Ideal sequence of events that the player has to actualize by mastering the simulations

Character	Character (cut-scene)
	or
	Player position (game)

(Juul, 2001, n.p.)

The movie version of *Highlander* does indeed include the components of existent, event, sequence of events and character, all laid out in coherent narrative order. Drawing on that matrix of constitutive elements that make up the story, Warren created what Juul lists as game ingredients: the continuous production of hordes of opponents, an ongoing simulation with multiple outcomes, an ideal sequence of events (leading to Warren as the final Immortal) actualized (at least mentally) through mastery of his simulated sword fights, and a player position (Warren at the centre of the ongoing story). In his mind, with his permanent focus on the dueling elements of the story, he was recasting the plot into a reiterable game function.

Warren's commitment to the story was sorely tested by the first movie sequel, however. No amount of good duelling would compensate for the kind of wholesale highjacking of the rules that featured *Highlander 2: The Quickening* (1991). Hsi, Forinash & Fuernsinn claim that this film "has become infamous as one of the worst sequels ever to hit the screen. . . .The director and writers had missed the point and the mystique that made *Highlander* special" (2000, n.p.).

Warrne Maynes, Margaret Mackey

The 1992 television series had the potential to make things even worse, but to Warren, at least, it offered some element of redemption.

Warren:

My faith was shaken in 1991 with the release of the second *Highlander* film. It was horrible and a traumatic experience overall. The greatest complaint I had was that they completely changed the rules of the *Highlander* universe. Obviously these rules would have needed to be massaged somewhat to create a sequel after the end of the first film in which there is only one Immortal left and he is no longer Immortal! I was prepared to accept something that ignores the last five minutes of the first film (where we learn without a doubt that the protagonist is the last of his kind) but not the abomination that I met. It speaks to the power of the original concept and to the degree that it had informed my life, that my faith survived the experience at all.

It was with trepidation therefore, that I saw my first episode of the television show when it came to syndicated television in 1992. I had hardened my heart and resolved to watch only for the duels. This strategy worked well but for the fact that as season progressed into season (it ran for six seasons and over 100 episodes) the stories became very engaging and the deep look at the world and character of the new eponymous Highlander became intoxicating. New Immortals were being 'born' all the time so just maybe…

I started university studies with a major in English so I could spot a marked improvement in the quality of the writing as well, but the duels were still my primary focus. The show

ran concurrently with and just past my undergraduate degree courses. It was very welcome company in that time of dramatic shifts in my world view granted by education, and no doubt it contributed to the evolution of my philosophy.

The rules of the first film had once more been altered but the fact was that the alterations were minor, made for better stories, and did not affect final outcomes either of the fights or the ultimate ending of the Prize. There was also the element of the continuous immersion in that interpretation for years, as one television series followed another, which contributed to my acceptance of that particular story world. There was a third film in 1994. But this was in a world of its own with yet another history and set of rules so it served only to increase my imaginary combat repertoire and did not give me the dry heaves as the first sequel had.

Margaret:

As he developed a deeper commitment to the TV series, Warren created his own ongoing "game kit" in a manner of speaking, by making videotapes that cut out all the plot development of the television programs and concentrated on the duel scenes, augmented by sections of conversation between Immortals concerning their place in history and their interactions with each other. He was fascinated by any insight into how the Immortals saw themselves in the world and their culture; many such insights were revealed only in brief snatches of dialogue that would be caught on tape if possible for later analysis. With this set of video highlights, his ability to reiterate combat highlights was rendered material as well as imaginative; not only did he collect duels to replay but he also

acquired snippets of information to enable him to build a more comprehensive understanding of the fictional world.

The game qualities of the *Highlander* saga were eventually rendered literal in a card game that became one of the most important elements of the whole experience for Warren. Exposure to the game marked a major turning point in his relationship with the story and it seems likely that it extended his imaginative relationship with that universe by many years.

Warren:

The third and final element that sealed my contract with the *Highlander* concept was the game. The idea of Collectible Card Games (CCGs) was relatively new and I attended a convention in 1994 where the creator of the Highlander CCG held a tournament to promote the launch of the game. I was hooked from the start. Here was the perfect synthesis of the best elements of the Highlander idea – the fighting. It also came with rules that were very simple and adaptable as future expansions arrived. It is ironic that even in this incarnation, shifts in the core rules became a regular occurrence. Errata were the order of the day as cards were misprinted or deemed to be too powerful and reprinted in a later expansion or simply corrected in extensive errata done by the company online, leaving players to learn the differences on their own. Despite this problem, the game thrived for a number of years. Even after the death of the company that released it, people on the World Wide Web created very graphically sophisticated cards that offered new expansions to the die-hard core fan base of the game and *Highlander* world[ii].

Basically the game is just a straight combat game. You start with a deck and then you have a hand of 15 cards, distributed at random. In your hand you have some defences and some attacks, organized on a grid. On the top left corner is a symbol denoting what type of card it is: attack, defence, event, situation. An attack marker on the grid can be blocked by a defence marker on the same part of the grid. When you don't defend you take damage, and the damage is recorded by the size of your hand. Everybody starts at 15 and if I get hit, my hand size decreases, limiting my play options to represent my becoming weaker.

The length of a game depends on the players but generally it is not longer than 20 minutes and you start again. We would play ten games at a time, sitting for hours in coffee shops. There is a multiplayer version but I generally play only two contestants at a time. I started with one friend and we later brought in a third player, and my girlfriend played at least once in a while.

I played this game religiously, every Saturday, for at least ten years. I still play it occasionally; but I have more time constraints now. The game never loses its charm because there is close to infinite variety. There are probably over a thousand different cards with different tests. So you can just change them up, make different strategies, use different personas – they have made about 30 characters. In the late 1990s, Thunder Castle Games died, so people on the Internet started making their own cards, and my friends and I wrote our own cards as well. I've probably written a thousand new and different cards myself over the years – I just use plastic sleeves for the cards with a scrap

of paper to insert. I don't use graphics and I don't print them off from the website – I don't have a printer and I am really interested only in the text and what the cards do, how it works.

Margaret:

With the card game, Warren was able to realize his preferred focus on the combat elements of the story in what was clearly a highly satisfying material format. In our discussion about the degree to which his gaming experience incorporated the significance of the originating fiction, his comments again indicate a continuum between story and game:

Margaret: So can I ask you a question about this game, how much it felt like a card game and how much it felt like a story?

Warren: It would depend on my mood I guess. It would pretty much just be, you could imagine the setting and things but it wasn't really a story as much as just a duel. It was like a combat sequence out of a story.

Margaret: So if you have a spectrum and at one end you have a full blooded narrative and at the other end you have a game of snap, which is also a combat game of a kind, where would you put this on the spectrum?

Warren: Probably in the middle somewhere, I guess, because you are always imagining the characters and you've seen them on the show or the movies so you are sort of picturing what they are doing and how they react to things. Each game has a larger story element. In film and TV, a sword fight is there not only to move plot forward, but to reveal the characters as

well. So my mental imagining of the game usually involves some context to why the two Immortals are fighting.

There is also a strong imagined sense of place too. The perpetual duels in my imagination act also as "scouting for locations" if you will. So many card game duels take place in my mind in places I have been physically.

Margaret: So there is a fictional component to it, it's not just pure *ha! I beat you!*

Warren: Yeah, I think so. I think so. It's interesting, another of the attractions would be that all the movie characters and all the TV characters could be potentially in the game. I think they almost have now been, with the Internet in here. So it's sort like all the continuity has been put into one. It's sort of like having one set of rules put on top of all the different ones. It sort of merges them. So it's nice to be able to see that even the characters from the second movie, which is horrible, are characters in the game, so you can create your own history for them and imagine them as if they were real.

Margaret: Put them in that world in a better way.

Warren: Yeah, exactly. So that's cool. That whole unifying feature of the game that I hadn't really thought of before, but that's what really makes it.

Margaret: So that's where the satisfaction of the big thing is?

Warren: Yeah, I think so, because it's everything together and you can meet, you can put anyone against anyone else even though they never really existed together in the continuity of the show.

Thus, to the satisfactions of the combat elements of the card game, Warren added the appeal of being able to imagine an integrated and coherent version of a fictional world that had been presented to him originally in fragmented ways. In addition by reiterating the most appealing "game" qualities of the sword fights, he was able to build, co-ordinate, and improve on the disparate components of his fiction. And he incorporated himself into these stories, providing settings from his own life.

Reflecting later on the different ways the world played out in his head, Warren added an interesting comment:

> In the arena of the card game, I see the action more as an unfolding narrative, like an episode of the show or a movie never filmed, things developing depending on the course of the game and the cards played. In my non-game time, the duels running through my head are more of a "role-playing" type, since it is easier to choreograph such action from a first-person perspective for me. I never imagine that I am Duncan or the Kurgan, but that I am crossing swords with them.

The Ongoing Appeal of the Hybrid

There is a famous scene in *Winnie the Pooh* in which Rabbit asks Pooh if he would like honey or condensed milk with his bread. Pooh opts for both, but then, "so as not to appear greedy," quickly adds, "But don't bother about the bread, please" (Milne, 1957/1926, 29). In his mental re-runs of *Highlander* duels, Warren is adopting something of the same strategy – extract the best bits from the story, turn them into repeatable yet ever-changing scenarios that incorporate elements of his own life and offer the ultimate

prize of immortality in a threatening world. Like Pooh concocting his sticky stew of honey and condensed milk, he has created a diet that may be described as consisting of all plums and no pudding – or, at a different level, all ongoing plot and no ending. Death is defeated by the final winning Immortal – but death is also deferred for any humble participant who manages just to keep on dueling. The reiterability of Warren's mental sword-fighting scenes means that he never has to reach the end of the story.

In appropriating the *Highlander* story into his own mental universe in this way, rejecting the versions that offend his highly-tuned sense of the proprieties of this particular fiction, we can see Warren behaving like the "poachers" that Henry Jenkins describes in his book on fan culture. Jenkins talks about

> fans as readers who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture. . . .Their activities pose important questions about the ability of media producers to constrain the creation and circulation of meanings. Fans construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, articulating concerns which often go unvoiced within the dominant media. (1992, 23)

Jenkins is talking about an overtly "participatory" fan culture, but Warren's engagement was something rather more internal. One way in which Warren made use of the *Highlander* story was as a kind of protective filter against the many demands of the daily world:

Margaret: So would you say when you first encountered this, or were in the fullest flush of your engagement with this, that being able to walk around internally being a hero was part of the appeal?

Warren: I don't even know if it was being a hero as much as being able to have only one thing to worry about at a time. Because if you're in the situation, career and stuff doesn't really matter [*laughter*].

Margaret: So it's a filter to keep things out?

Warren: Yeah exactly. It was like to be able to have a real focus, just imagining, not having to really worry about being sick or going to school.

Margaret: So all your energy just goes down one road –

Warren: To survive – becoming –

Margaret: I can see the appeal of that all right.

Warren: That's really, yeah, I think that's the heart of it, just the oneness, like the motto there can be only one, it sort of applies in other ways –

Margaret: Like only one issue –

Warren: Yeah exactly.

Margaret: Life is not complicated –

Warren: Well it sort of is – it is as complicated as you make it. For example, Macleod with his moral quandaries makes it pretty complex. A Methos-type just walks away and changes identity and problem solved [*laughter*].

This conversation provides an interesting gloss on Jenkins' description. It is certainly clear that Warren is "borrowing and inflecting" elements of the *Highlander* mythology, but he is doing so in highly private and thoughtful ways.

Social Supports for Private Imaginings

In Warren's descriptions of his encounters with the stories and duels of *Highlander*, it may seem that the most social element of this engagement involves one or two card partners. However, a more overt social support structure does actually underlie much of this account, sometimes in passive ways and sometimes actively.

Warren first picked out *Highlander* from a display of staff recommendations at his video store. He learned about the card game in 1994 at a convention where the creator of the *Highlander* collectible card game held a tournament to promote the launch of the game. He was immediately hooked and knew that the local comic and games shop would supply him with his cards. Staff at this store noticed him buying the cards every week and eventually asked him to do a demonstration of the game for customers at the store. It was at this demo that he met one of his card-playing partners.

I was asked by the card game specialist of the comic book shop at the time, 1997 or 1998, if I wanted to do it. I thought it would be fun and so we had a couple tables set up. It was promoted by posters a week or two ahead and around 15 people came out. As far as I know the game only struck a chord with one of them, the aforementioned friend. We basically played and showed anyone interested, how to play. They were all people who played one CCG or another.

Inevitably as time passed and Warren's commitment to the game continued, the Internet came into play as well, publishing errata notes for the cards, supplying additional fan-designed cards, and offering opportunities for correspondence. Warren seems to have treated these possibilities very selectively, just as he pays only cursory attention to the big tournaments that are organized for *Highlander* players. He is able to describe how the rules are altered for these big games, but he did not express any great interest in taking part.

Promoters of books for young people could benefit from attending to the details of this story. Warren has been actively committed to the story of *Highlander* for the best part of two decades, exploring many different media incarnations of the story, and developing critical expertise and emotional satisfaction over a long period of time. A teacher or librarian who perceived young people engaged with books in this way would be highly satisfied. It is noteworthy that the popular culture support system worked well in this story, providing venues to introduce new materials and reliable structures to supply updates on a regular basis. Some series books are supported in similarly helpful and timely ways, as are books that are adapted for film. It is worth considering whether and how librarians in particular might adapt these structures for promoting more literary works, while retaining the virtues of their own more disinterested motivation. The question, "How would we behave if we wanted to make money from this?" is a very coarse guide but one that has some utility for literacy professionals all the same.

Teachers tread a more delicate line than librarians who deal more straightforwardly with issues of supply. There is always a danger in attempting to co-opt students' private tastes and pleasures for classroom work; students may conceivably wind up despising both their formerly favourite texts and also their English classes. There is certainly scope, however, for general discussion of how commercial promoters foster and support engagement with particular texts. The example of *Highlander* offers points where cynical commercialism seems to have triumphed (as in the first movie sequel, for example) and points where the power of the main idea seems to have conquered in more palatable ways. It would not be difficult for teachers to make room in their syllabi for students to discuss a multi-platform text and to explore why one version works better than another. There is no particular reason why they should all work with the same example; it is a rare school student these days who is not familiar with at least one example of a story and sequels appearing in more than one medium. The question of when cynicism ruins a story and when (as in Warren's case) the commitment survives being brutalized by inept sequels is one of inherent interest to students and teachers alike.

The Mystery of Appeal

Good support systems are certainly important, but there is a significant gap between the video store's display of recommended movies and Warren's passionate commitment to the story of *Highlander*. No amount of display and promotion will cross that gap.

In this case, a combination of intellectual and affective charge seems to have been the successful mix. Warren's imagination was caught by the appeal of the sword fight, and his wits were challenged by the need to figure out what was going on. When he deduced

not only the plot but also the highly structured set of rules that governs actions in *Highlander*, he enjoyed the orderliness of the universe that was being unfolded around him. The huge psychological appeal of a world that is not morally simple but at least morally *clarified* caught him at a vulnerable point, as an adolescent who perceived his own world to be turbulent, chaotic, and full of risks that no amount of valour or skill could conquer. That he achieved an understanding of this different moral world through successfully applying his intelligence to the gaps the story placed before him seems also to have contributed enormously to his engagement with that story. Furthermore, that story developed in such a way that the most appealing parts could be reiterated with undiminishing satisfaction. Although some versions of the *Highlander* story were contradictory and upsetting, the card game offered a way to extract the most appealing elements of even those versions and place them in a broader universe whose coherence is built by readers and players in the course of their game. It is not difficult to see the charm of such fictional arrangements.

As it happens, Warren's prior encounters with fiction gave him the repertoire he needed to make an immediate connection with *Highlander* when he first saw it. He had a long private history of imaginary sword fights, based on the light sabres of *Star Wars*, and his extended interest in *Conan the Barbarian* (supported by a sympathetic librarian) developed his passion for collecting and for pursuing a variety of leads in order to create and expand a mental universe. *Highlander*, at a crucial point in his adolescence, offered

him a vehicle for transferring this kind of imaginative life to the setting of the real world that surrounded and perturbed him.

In addition, his real-life fencing activities gave Warren a physical route into imagining the story. He played the sword fights bodily as well as mentally. We are accustomed to noticing the role of play-acting in the imaginative lives of small children; it is easy to overlook its importance for older readers.

This description of Warren's contingent background and tastes is not, of course, a template for how to get a young person to like a story. However, his ongoing commitment to this world and his ability to recall his initial responses and articulate his motives does offer us a rare window into the very private zone of the most passionate and committed form of reader response.

Warren:

Looking over the transcripts and thinking about this process, I have reached some conclusions about my interest in this world.

- The first theme that I picked out was the fact that figuring things out for myself was a major attraction. I talk about this in relation to the film at the start of the transcript but it connects with the game in a way that I did not get into at that point. The cards in the first run and to a lesser degree in the following editions of the print game were misprinted here and there. I should say mis*written* because they were far too open for interpretation by exacting gamers who, in my experience are very picky about just what a card means. Any ambiguity can cause

heated moments and confusion. The company issued extensive errata lists over the years that they were solvent and this has been a common feature I have found in such games. If not actual errata then a company will provide examples to cover different situations and much more detailed versions of the rules. So the idea of connecting the dots, whether of how the Universe worked or the game did is a powerful element of my interaction with the *Highlander* story.

- Another thing that comes up more than once is the idea of combining the different worlds together into a coherent entity. Again, the game figures large here because it allows everyone to meet everyone else.

- I think that it is largely the idea of narrative that underlies the attraction for me. I can create the story surrounding the meeting of two Immortals – in the game or my own imagination – have the fight and let it go. This also relieves me from having to commit to an entire structured narrative, so as a wannabe writer, I can get away with only doing part of the story since the whole story is centuries long.

- Another narrative related element is the combat itself. The best choreographed fights, according to a few sword-masters (the fellows whose job it is to create the combat sequences…my dream job) I have heard interviewed, is to display aspects of the combatants' character traits. Their weapons, the way they move, *et cetera*, all show the viewer more about the nature of the character. Each fight has to have something to do with the story and it is the story and its quality that makes one care about who wins the fight.

- Something else I picked out was the moral aspect. The spectrum of Methos as the ultimate survivor and Duncan as a traditional hero has informed my thinking more than I'd probably like to admit. It is the debate between them that interests me. I wonder which way I would go. Hypothetical situation:

  I'm an Immortal. You and I are talking when an old enemy of mine, whom I know to be utterly psycho shows up 30 feet away. He has seen us talking and guesses that you mean something to me. I know this guy is as good with a sword as I am or perhaps better. Duncan would tell you to run and he would draw steel to hold him off while you made your getaway even if it meant his death. Methos would probably run like a rabbit leaving you to your unpleasant fate. What do I do? Is there a middle ground in this situation? I have heard soldiers say you don't know who you are until you are under fire. Part of me wishes I never have to learn and part of me is curious. This is the type of question that I find interesting and it is stimulated by the television show and the Universe it is set in. The situation I present is obviously extreme and so are those of the show, but I think they can inspire more reality-based pondering about one's own attitudes and commitments.

Understanding Appeal: Two Perspectives

Margaret:

What Warren describes above is clearly a form of commitment that remains alive in his mind even after so many years. How may we understand such an attraction?

Norman Holland provides one kind of lens on ways that readers interact with particular texts, drawing on elements of psychoanalysis to explore reader behaviours:

Warrne Maynes, Margaret Mackey

> The reader uses the literary work to create in himself a dynamic psychological process that transforms raw fantasy materials to conscious significance. In this process, he makes use of two basic agents of transformation. One is the press toward theme and meaning, a transformation analogous to sublimation or symbolization in everyday life. . . .
>
> The other agent of transformation (besides the process of meaning) is that catchall of aesthetic notions, form. Critics define form in its broadest sense as "all devices that structure content," but, of course, texts do not structure content – people do. Formal devices become part of the reading experience only as they become part of the reader's devices. (1975, 16)

Holland talks about a reader's use of forms as comparable to making use of a general set of defense mechanisms: "putting dangers from inside outside or from outside inside, refusing to acknowledge them, trying to undo them magically, and so on" (1975, 16). Warren's response to the terrors of mortality as he experienced them as a teenager in the 1980s was shaped through the prism of *Highlander* and fits very neatly onto Holland's description; in his account of his own reactions, we can see him "pressing towards theme and meaning," "putting dangers from inside outside or from outside inside."

It would doubtless be possible to expand extensively on this theme but I am neither qualified nor appropriately situated to analyze Warren's response in these broad terms and I raise it only as a suggestive indicator. A second way of looking at this long-term

attraction is from the perspective of the outside observer/helper. Warren himself is now an adult and fully able to make his own choices about his fictional tastes. However, his attachment to the *Highlander* universe began when he was still in school and lasted throughout his university years as well, times when he had teachers and possibly school and/or public librarians who might have felt some professional obligation to expand his tastes and enhance his readings of this universe if they had known about the intensity of his attachment to a single story.

The roles of adults in relation to a teenager's reading and viewing and playing activities and tastes are complex and variable. Parents, teachers and librarians may well take different stances towards the fictional life of a young reader. The commitment of parents is personal and, in a way, singular, but teachers and librarians have professional positions to consider, and it is useful to think through the implications of these diverse professional stances.

One significant difference between how the teacher and the librarian meet the young reader is that the teacher stance involves *changing* that reader in many ways while the librarian deals with the reader *as-is*.[iii] It is easy for teachers to perceive librarians as indifferent to the many ways in which anyone's reading could be enhanced and "improved," and it is also easy for librarians to perceive teachers as disrespectful of readers' rights and needs and as feeling a constant need to meddle and make judgments. In fact, the distinctions reflect different job descriptions and professional priorities, and it seems clear to me that we will all do a better job of dealing with young readers if we are

clear about these stances, their origins in professional practices, and their positive and negative implications for meeting the needs of young readers.

Educating readers so that their understanding becomes broader and more subtle is a challenging job. Equally, understanding, respecting and meeting the needs and desires of young readers as they are independently expressed is also a demanding task. Readers will best flourish when they are exposed to both stances on the part of the professionals in their lives.

There is a further ingredient that often appears in the attitudes of parents, teachers and librarians alike: judgment. Holland quotes a pertinent line from Walter Slatoff, who said, "We rarely concern ourselves, for example, with the problem of individual differences among readers. . . .On the few occasions we do entertain such questions we speak as though they were settled by reducing response to two categories – appropriate and inappropriate" (1970, quoted in Holland, 1975, 7). Although Slatoff was writing thirty-five years ago, there are still many homes, schools and libraries where little has changed. It is not difficult to imagine some or all of the adults in the teenage Warren's life nudging him towards a more "appropriate" response to this movie than the wholehearted, passionate and long-lived commitment that he chose to manifest. It is interesting that in his final response to this whole project, Warren balked at the idea of "appropriateness." School students are not always in a position to comment on their

elders' notions of appropriateness; as an adult, Warren no doubt speaks for many of those students in his objection to the idea of suitability being imposed from without.

Yet teachers have an obligation to expose their students to a broad range of materials other than the items of popular culture that happen to attract their loyal attention. Is there a lesson for teachers in Warren's story – other than to notice that teachers are remarkably absent from a story of two decades of commitment to a particular fiction?

Creating a "safe" intellectual space in a classroom where students' own choices and preferences are genuinely respected is an essential step in creating a true community of interpreters. Teachers routinely expect students to respect the text choices made by teachers; a reciprocal respect for students' recreational tastes would open the door for more productive conversation. But such respect cannot be faked, and teachers need to explore imaginative ways to make room for their students to feel comfortable in talking about their out-of-school passions. Not all such passions have to be shared by everybody; you do not have to be a *Highlander* fan, for example, to see the potential for drawing on Warren's story to open a dynamic and stimulating classroom discussion.

At the end of this long exploration, from internal and external perspectives, of Warren's ongoing deep pleasure in the story of *Highlander*, I still find the core of the attraction a mystery. What is it about *this* story, *this* reader that leads to such a lifelong fusion? The themes and images of *Highlander* are now woven into the texture of most of Warren's

life. How different a person would he be if he had not come across this story during his adolescence? I will leave the final word to Warren.

Warren:

To answer the last question first, how different a person would I be if I had not come across this story when I did: I shudder to think. I can well imagine adults during my *Highlander* obsession's nascent phase trying to divert me but I am sure they would only have succeeded in derailing me. If *Highlander* and/or my response to it were to be judged inappropriate, I can only ask inappropriate how? To whom? For making me into a balanced "normal" and productive member of society? I am a professional librarian, happily married, know the difference between right and wrong and tend to act on this knowledge where appropriate and possible. What more could these blinkered "adults" have hoped for? I suspect they would have patted themselves on the back if I never landed in the papers as the result of a sword-related arrest. I tend to take a longer term view than most people. I can trace my reading progress from Conan to *Finnegans Wake*, so no deficiencies there. But please don't misunderstand my use of "progress." I am speaking strictly temporally, with no judgment of merit intended.

Highlander gave me a framework with which to explore and deal with some of life's cruel realities and understand my own morals and beliefs when nothing else was up to the task in my younger self's eyes.

As for Margaret's question of "*this* story, *this* reader," I can only answer that I do not know and put it down to luck. The luck held long past the initial spark and until a point

where I was beyond the power of potential meddlers. For me the luck has been extraordinarily good; from the perspective of others, perhaps not. But in the end, their opinion does not really matter.

References

Alexander, Kristin J., Peggy J. Miller & Julie A. Hengst. (2001) "Young Children's Emotional Attachments to Stories." *Social Development 10*(3), 374-398.

Bettelheim, Bruno. (1977) *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Holland, Norman N. (1975) *5 Readers Reading*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Isi, Idris, J.D. Forinash & Joel Fuernsinn. (2000, September 3). "Movie Review: *Highlander: Endgame* (2000). http://www.cc.gatech.edu/people/home/idris/Movie_Reviews/Review_Highlander_Endgame.htm, accessed May 19, 2005

Jenkins, Henry. (1992) *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Juul, Jesper. (2001, July) "Games Telling Stories? A Brief Note on Games and Narratives." *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research 1*(1). http://www.gamestudies.org/0101juul-gts/, accessed May 19, 2005.

McEwan, Ian. (2005) *Saturday*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada.

Milne, A.A. *The World of Pooh: The Complete Winnie-the-Pooh and The House at Pooh Corner*. Illus. E.H. Shepard. 1926, 1928. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1957.

Walther, Bo Kampmann. (2003, May) "Playing and Gaming: Reflections and Classifications." *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research 3*(1). http://www.gamestudies.org/0301/walther/ , accessed May 19, 2005.

White, Dorothy. (1954) *Books Before Five*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Wolf, Shelby Ann & Shirley Brice Heath. (1992) *The Braid of Literature: Children's Worlds of Reading*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Links

- The Highlander Wikipedia entry is very helpful in distinguishing the various interpretations of the story.

  http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highlander_%28series%29 Accessed last September 30, 2006.

- The Official Highlander Fan Club's site contains information on current activities of the actors from the series and movies as well as updates on new incarnations of the story in movies and other media.

  http://www.highlanderworldwide.com/news/index.shtml Accessed last September 30, 2006.

- The Official Highlander Message Board is very busy and contains threads of discussion concerning every aspect of the Highlander universe.

http://www.highlander-community.com/cgi-bin/messageboard/ultimatebb.cgi

Accessed last September 30, 2006.

- The Seventh Dimension Highlander Fan Fiction Archive is a large storehouse of

  dozens of fan fiction stories involving characters from the Highlander universe.

  http://www.seventh-dimension.org/index.html Accessed last September 30, 2006

---

[i] HIGHLANDER is a worldwide copyright and trademark of Davis•Panzer Productions, Inc. and Gétéve.

[ii] The Missing Link Expansions can be seen here: http://www.mleccg.com/mlc/index.html

[iii] I am indebted to Heide Blackmore of Strathcona County Library, Alberta, for first drawing the importance of this distinction to my attention.

Authors' note: Thanks to Shelagh Genuis for support with the literature search.

A narrative technique (known for literary fictional narratives as a literary technique, literary device, or fictional device) is any of several specific methods the creator of a narrative uses to convey what he or she wantsâ€"in other words, a strategy used in the making of a narrative to relay information to the audience and particularly to develop the narrative, usually in order to make it more complete, complex, or interesting. Literary techniques are distinguished from literary elements, which exist Read 5 examples of narrative that show how to use narration for multiple means: Giving strong character backstory, showing historical context and more. Â Narration and narrative are two key terms in writing fiction. Read on to learn what narrative is, as well as five types of narrative, with examples: First: What is narrative? Narrative is writing that connects ideas, concepts or events. The definitions below show three important aspects of narration in storytelling: It connects events, showing their patterns, relating them to each other or to specific ideas, themes or concepts. It is a practice and art in that when we tell a story, we shape the narrative â€" the connection between events. First published in Great Britain in 1962 by Hamish Hamilton Ltd. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation and Hamish Hamilton Ltd. Excerpts from Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov, copyright O 1955 by Vladimir Nabokov; reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons and Weidenfeld & Nicolson. Â Implied Reader, Narratee Point of View and Its Relation to Narrative Voice Point of View in Film Narrators' and Characters' Speech Acts "Nonnarrated" Representation in General Nonnarrated Types: Written Records Pure Speech Records Soliloquy. Records of Thought: Direct Free Style=Interior Monologue Stream of Consciousness=Free Association Interior Monologue in the Cinema. Learn How to Create Stories That Captivate Agents, Editors, and Readers Alike! Inside you'll find Narrative and Numbers: The Value of Stories in Business. 295 PagesÂ·2017Â·2.66 MBÂ·7,033 DownloadsÂ·New! can best test a story's plausibility. Narrative and Numbers: The Value of Stories in Business The Laws of Charisma: How to Captivate, Inspire, and Influence for Maximum Success. 225 PagesÂ·2010Â·934 KBÂ·15,312 DownloadsÂ·New! . The Laws of Charisma: How to Captivate, Inspire, and Influence for Maximum Success Kurt W. Mortensen The Art of Fashion Illustration: Learn the Techniques