

Bojana Vuĳin*
Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu
Univerzitet u Novom Sadu

UDC: 391.43
316.722
004::316.3
DOI: 10.19090/gff.v48i3.2379
Original research paper

“YOU, MY FRIEND, ARE ALL THAT’S LEFT OF THEIR RELIGION”: STAR WARS, FANDOM AND NOSTALGIA

A long time ago (though not in a galaxy far, far away), fandom was seen at best as an offshoot of cultural studies, and at worst, as an acceptable target of ridicule and Othering. Since the early 1990s and the pioneering work of scholars like Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith, however, fandom has gained respectability (and profitability) as both a multidisciplinary area of study and a lucrative part of commercial popular culture. Today, we live in an unprecedented time: not only have fandom and nerd culture become mainstream, but they have joined forces with rhizomatic web platforms and formed a digital age where transmediality reigns supreme, and where stories have become Intellectual Properties. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in *Star Wars* – once a film series authored by a single creator, now a megacorporation-owned franchise with multiple authors, narratives, and storytelling platforms. As a result, the *Star Wars* fandom, never an inviting space, has fractured even more and turned to nostalgia as a source of comfort, with predictably volatile results, as different fandom factions lay sole claim to historicity and authenticity. *Star Wars* thus occupies the perfect liminal space between fandom and hatredom, present and past, nostalgia and schmaltz. Using contemporary fan studies scholarship, this paper examines the role of nostalgia in today’s *Star Wars* fandom, with the emphasis on media convergence and cultural wars in digital social spaces, thus exploring popular convergence culture at large.

Key words: *Star Wars*, fandom studies, nostalgia, popular culture, digital social space

The title quote of this paper comes from the original *Star Wars* movie, later renamed *Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977). Darth Vader is convinced that he can sense his old master, Obi-Wan Kenobi, on board the Death Star, but Grand Moff Tarkin, the film’s Big Bad, tells him that Jedi are “all but extinct”, and that he is “all that’s left of their religion.” Of course, Vader is right – not only is he not the only Force-wielder left, but the belief in the Force remains strong, if diminished, throughout the Galaxy. Somewhere in there is a metaphor for fandom and its many subjective

* bojana.vujin@ff.uns.ac.rs

manifestations, from its resemblance to religion¹, to the unwavering, if entirely biased belief that we must be the only ones left who are doing fandom right. The only thing that might be a somewhat objective fact is fandom's indestructibility in the face of change.

Like the rest of worldly affairs in the pre-digital age, fandom was also once an altogether analogue, real-life experience. Since the mid-to-late 1990s, however, it has migrated almost exclusively into the digital space. Today, as we move further into Web 2.0², the age of deplorably capitalist internet and fandom-as-business industry, we, who are known in the online world as "fandom olds", look back at earlier fandom phases with nostalgia, convinced that the glory days are behind us. But is it really so? Or is it purely a side-effect of ageing? In this paper, I intend to (at least attempt to) find an answer to these questions, using *Star Wars* as an example.

The reason for this choice is as logical as it is simple. *Star Wars* has been around for so long that it has gone through all the major fandom phases, from fanzines, early cosplay and amateur fan-made films in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to the embrace of newly established online fandom spaces at the turn of the millennium, to today's SocMed dominated internet. Furthermore, *Star Wars* has never been a particularly welcoming fandom: unlike the (OG) fandom that rose around *Star Trek*, which relied on the communities marginalised in conventional sci-fi spaces, i.e., mostly women, working together to create a place for other women to enjoy (cf. Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Vujin, 2023b), *Star Wars* as a fandom has been (up until very recently) heavily male-dominated, with nerd culture's toxic masculinity and misogynist attitudes serving as perfect gatekeeping tools of exclusion (cf. Scott, 2019). With the rise of social media, particularly hostile online spaces such as Twitter (hostile even before the Musk takeover), these problems became rather

¹ Fandom has some elements in common with religion (e.g. intense devotion, affective experience, infighting between factions, adoration and exaltation of beloved figures (which is particularly evident in sports fandoms and their worship of athletes) or pilgrimages to "sacred" sites, such as Graceland for Elvis fans), but the comparison should not be made crudely or taken lightly, as it was often used in the past in order to pathologise fannish engagement. It would be better to say that fandom frequently employs some religious practices (like pilgrimage); however, it does not really function as a religion. For more on this, cf. Booth, 2018: 207–225.

² A term coined in 1999 by web designer and author Darcy DiNucci, Web 2.0 refers to the current era of the Internet, dominated by social media platforms, user-generated content and endless advertising. In the current digital climate, regular site visitors, bloggers, app users, etc. are not the actual clients, but instead product to be sold (through data collecting) to the real end users – advertising companies.

more apparent, with regular mass cyberbullying of women, POCs and queer people associated with the franchise (cf. Booth, 2018; Scott, 2019; Click, 2019). Nevertheless, we cannot simply blame toxic masculinity and bigoted nerd culture for everything – if anything, it is just the latest in many iterations of *Star Wars* fandom’s hypercritical attitude to any changes in the franchise.

As I already mentioned, *Star Wars* has been around for a long time. Originally conceived as a single movie that came out in 1977 (later renamed *Episode IV: A New Hope*), *Star Wars* soon grew into a trilogy (with the release of *Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* in 1980 and *Episode VI: Return of the Jedi* in 1983). These three films were later grouped as the Original Trilogy, because creator George Lucas planned to film at least three more movies in the franchise. In 1999, the long-awaited *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, the first film in the new, Prequel Trilogy was released, followed by *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* in 2002 and *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* in 2005. In 2012, George Lucas sold Lucasfilm to Disney, and they created the Sequel Trilogy (*Episode VII: The Force Awakens* in 2015, *Episode VIII: The Last Jedi* in 2017, and *Episode IX: The Rise of Skywalker* in 2019), along with some other stand-alone movies, TV series (both animated and live-action), comic books, novels, video games and numerous other stories that work together to create a single transmedia narrative. Thus, we can differentiate between three distinct narrative phases in the *Star Wars* franchise: the Original Trilogy (OT) era, the Prequel Trilogy (PT) era, and the Disney era.³ Each of these distinct periods has their fans and anti-fans⁴, with the common denominator being nostalgia: usually, fans will love the phase that was most relevant during their childhood, and actively hate the phase(s) that threaten to spoil that halcyon impression. Those who disagree are often accused of not being “real fans”, or of “doing fandom wrong”.

Fandom attitudes are, paradoxically, both stubbornly adhered to and prone to change, depending on what fans find most likeable or offensive at any given moment. In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (1992), his pioneering study which brought fandom into academia, Henry Jenkins states that fans are equal parts fascinated and frustrated with the objects of fandom. Fans are not

³ For more on this, including how each of the narrative phases treats the character of Darth Vader, cf. Vujin, 2023a.

⁴ “Anti-fans”, a term coined by fandom scholar Jonathan Gray in 2003, refers to those audiences who actively dislike texts and objects of fandom, and engage with them in ways similar to their fans, i.e. they are often organised, highly visible, and intimately involved in the texts they find intolerable. For more on this, cf. Gray–Sandvoss–Harrington, 2007: 283–356 and Click, 2019.

simply adoring audiences, and fandom has never been a truly unified space, which earlier cultural theorists failed to recognise. In his seminal (though short-sighted and casually sexist – cf. McRobbie, 1991: 16–34) book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Dick Hebdige discusses subcultures as opposed to mainstream, while in “The Cultural Economy of Fandom”, first published in 1992, John Fiske says that fans police the borders of fannish spaces against intruders (cf. Fiske, 2001: 34–35). Neither Hebdige nor Fiske are members of the subcultures they examine, and so they fail to recognise the actual nature of fandom as subculture, which later theorists of fandom, such as Jenkins, who identify as fans, easily spot: the subcultural element is not united against outsiders, but plagued with infighting. In other words, fandom is divided into warring factions, and the wars are brutal. Since fans are active, affective audiences who engage with texts from a much shorter distance than casual readers/viewers/listeners etc., it is inevitable that such emotional investment leads to deeply personal views and more intense interactions with other fans, both positive and negative ones.

Apart from the division into three phases across years, *Star Wars* can also be divided into two distinct creative phases: the George Lucas years and the Disney years. Here we can see the difference between earlier models of creativity, where authors used to create works of art, and today’s conglomerate culture, where monopolistic corporations like Disney have control over the world’s most popular stories (including, but not limited to, both *Star Wars* and *Marvel* franchises), which are no longer seen as works of art, but as IPs, or Intellectual Properties. Authors (writers, directors, etc.) are no longer artists, but content creators, and they are hired for their ability to adapt their style to existing storyworld rules, and not for their originality.⁵ The resulting stories are, understandably, less daring than those that came before them. Lack of a single unifying voice leads to disparity in tone and vision in the Disney era *Star Wars*, with varying levels of success across transmedia narratives. The almost universal disappointment with *The Rise of Skywalker*, both in critical and fan circles, served as a painful reminder that, when it comes to storytelling, playing it safe, with no clear artistic vision and no originality, is a no-win strategy.

⁵ The utter disdain for the profession of media writing on the part of corporations can be illustrated by the fact that, after weeks of failed negotiations with studios and streamers, in which they demanded fair pay, the Writers Guild of America (WGA) were forced to go on strike, starting with 2 May 2023 (cf. WGA On Strike). It took 148 days for an agreement to be reached, and the strike officially ended only on 27 September 2023.

However, no matter how nostalgic today’s fans might be for Lucas’ *Star Wars*, it should not be forgotten that not so long ago, Lucas was considered a persona non grata in his own franchise, and his sale of Lucasfilm to Disney was seen as a chance for them to save *Star Wars*. *The Force Awakens*, a fun, but unoriginal rehash of *A New Hope*, was considered a return to form – here, we can see the commercialization of nostalgia in action, with the entertainment industry using nostalgia to turn fans into ideal consumers (cf. Niemeyer, 2014). *The Last Jedi*, while critically appreciated and at least somewhat creative and original, caused a divide in fandom which still lasts, while *The Rise of Skywalker* cemented the Sequel Trilogy’s fate as a generally reviled, soulless attempt to cash in on a franchise that refuses to die. Fans are fickle, and their goodwill, once earned, does not last forever. George Lucas’s position in the *Star Wars* fandom is a perfect example of that. In 1997, to coincide with the saga’s twentieth anniversary, Lucas released digitally enhanced versions of the original films in cinemas, which caused a lot of discontent in the fandom, as fans did not want “their” movies to be changed.

Here, I can introduce the notion of nostalgia. Children’s narratives, such as *Star Wars*⁶, tend to be regarded as special, and fiercely protected even into adulthood. Children’s literature is frequently judged by standards other than purely aesthetic. Narratives aimed at children often have nostalgia in them, whether by invoking “childhood magic”, looking at childhood through half-schmaltzy, half-nostalgic lens coinciding with the outdated, pseudo-Romantic ideas of constructed child as innocence personified, or trying to recapture a vague child-like feeling that has been irrevocably lost (and might never have actually existed at all). Fans who employ this kind of nostalgia are always going to find anything new lacking, because nothing can recapture the nostalgic idea of what it was to watch *Star Wars* as a child. Nostalgia, as Katharina Niemeyer (2014: 6) explains, “could be described as being a liminal, ambiguous phenomenon that migrates into deep emotional and psychological structures as well as into larger cultural, social, economic and political ones.” In the case of *Star Wars*, the films that we watched as children carry with them a particular “aura” of nostalgic yearning for childhood, and anything that threatens that image is regarded with hostility. Someone who is not a fan, but simply a viewer of *Star Wars*, might not understand why many fans see Lucas’ constant tinkering with his films (e.g. introduction of new CGI elements into the OT, or more substantial changes like

⁶ Despite its timeless quality, mostly thanks to certain universal narrative structures (heroic quest/Campbellian monomyth in the OT and classic tragedy in the PT – cf. Vujin, 2023a), *Star Wars* was, as Lucas has always insisted, originally conceived for twelve year olds.

the insertion of Hayden Christensen in place of Sebastian Shaw as Anakin's Force ghost in *Return of the Jedi*) as betrayal. However, for a fan, this amounts to sacrilege, and the comparisons with religion are once again inevitable.

Nowhere is this attitude more easily recognised than in the documentary *The People vs. George Lucas* (2010). Here, the interviewees, ranging from fans to fellow authors and academics (e.g. Henry Jenkins), express their opinions about both *Star Wars* and Lucas himself. They voice their feelings of absolute betrayal by what they see as meddling with history⁷ – Lucas allegedly sealed the original, unedited versions of the OT; consequently, only the enhanced versions can be legally obtained.⁸ The brunt of the attack, however, was reserved for the Prequel Trilogy. As legend goes, George Lucas originally planned to make three trilogies. That plan did not come to fruition, largely owing to fandom – Lucas was so frustrated by the backlash the PT received that he sold Lucasfilm to Disney and retreated into relative obscurity. In one of his rare public appearances, at the 40-year celebration of *Star Wars* in 2017, he only (rather gracefully) commented that fans “haven't always been kind”⁹.

It is interesting to note that the majority of attacks on the PT came from adults, i.e. those who were children or young adults when the OT was released and came to associate it with the spirit of childhood and glory days of youth. This can be clearly seen in the documentary's soundtrack, as one of the songs featured in *The People vs. George Lucas* is tellingly named “George Lucas Raped Our Childhood”. Interestingly enough, younger fans who were not even born when the OT was released in cinemas understandably had much less investment in it. They – and I count myself among them – did not hate either the PT or the enhanced version of the OT nearly as much, if at all. However, for the fans who came to associate *Star Wars*

⁷ Fans consider Lucas' digital changes to the OT to be extremely hypocritical, because in 1988, Lucas testified in front of the US Senate asking for the protection of the cultural film heritage against alterations by corporations (the testimony is in the public domain and can be found on Wikisource – link in references). Opinions about his moral right to change his own films *post factum* aside, the Lucas detractors seemingly fail to understand the difference between an author willingly changing their work and a copyright-holding corporation doing it for them without their consent.

⁸ This hasn't stopped fans from painstakingly removing Lucas' changes from the films. One of the better-received fan-made versions is known as the “Despecialized Edition” (as a response to Lucas' enhanced “Special Edition”) and can be found online in less legal parts of the Internet.

⁹ The interview is not currently available – I watched it as part of 24/7 livestream of the 2017 *Star Wars* celebration on the official *Star Wars* YouTube channel.

with childhood itself, any perceived threat to it is seen as violation. This is related to the Kantian idea of nostalgia, which refers less to homesickness, and more to the desire to return to one’s youth. As he explains in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), this kind of nostalgia in people is

the result of a longing for the places where they enjoyed the very simple pleasures of life – aroused by the recollection of images of the carefree life and neighborly company in their early years. For later, after they visit these same places, they are greatly disappointed in their expectations and thus also find their homesickness cured. To be sure, they think that this is because everything there has changed a great deal, but in fact it is because they cannot bring back their youth there. (Kant, 2006: 71)

Such nostalgia combined with unrealistic expectations plays a huge role in the birth of the “disappointed anti-fandom” (Gray), i.e. the anti-fandom that is a result of fans being disappointed by the directions taken by the text, which leads to their refusal to accept those changes, various attempts to “fix” them through transformative¹⁰ action, or ultimate rejection of the text itself (cf. Click, 2019: 30–32). In the years between the Original Trilogy and the Prequel Trilogy, both fandom and official transmedia stories (i.e. mostly comics and novels, previously known as Extended Universe (EU) and now relegated to Legends status) built up a certain image of the Star Wars universe that did not necessarily coincide with Lucas’ ideas, as he retained only loose control over EU stories. Even if he did everything “right”, it would have been impossible for Lucas to live up to the expectations of the fandom. However, when the prequels came out, the backlash against them rose to the levels of pure vitriol. Many, particularly older, fans outright rejected the idea that Darth Vader, whom they came to associate with gravitas and “badassery” started out as a whiny child who used to yell silly phrases like “Yippee”. Add to that the demystification of the Force into the pseudoscientific idea of midi-chlorians, and the politically heavy content of trade disputes and senate arguments, and the fans

¹⁰ Fandom theory recognises two types of fannish engagement, affirmational and transformative. Affirmational fandom is masculine-coded, and usually acknowledges the supremacy of the canonical text. Affirmational fans often worship the author (or turn against them if they feel betrayed, as was the case with Lucas), possess encyclopaedic knowledge of the text and engage in activities like collecting, which reaffirm the primacy of the author and text. Transformative fandom, on the other hand, is feminine-coded, and treats canon as a springboard for fannish creativity. Transformative fans usually engage in practices that place fans, and not texts or creators at the centre, like writing and reading fanfiction, creating fan videos, fan art, etc. Historically, it is transformative fandom that has been the locus of academic study of fandom.

suddenly found themselves in – to use Kant’s imagery – the village of their childhood, where everything seemed to be different from what they remembered. Without their youth, the whole experience was far less magical, and they blamed it on the film, its creator and its actors.

Coinciding with the birth of digital fandom, *The Phantom Menace* also has the dubious honour of being one of the first films to inspire online hate campaigns: actor Ahmed Best, who played the reviled character of Jar Jar Binks, faced such media backlash that he contemplated suicide (cf. Parker, 2018), while Jake Lloyd, who portrayed the child Anakin Skywalker and was only ten years old at the time, was harassed so viciously that he quit acting, a fact that is even more appalling in light of his mental health problems¹¹ (cf. Seibold, 2022). Clearly, the *Star Wars* fandom does not take betrayal lightly, and it will make its displeasure known, no matter the consequences. What is more, this behaviour does not change, as can be seen from the recent cyberbullying of actors Kelly Marie Tran, John Boyega and Moses Ingram, allegedly a form of protest against their characters, but in reality inspired almost exclusively by racism and misogyny¹² that is rampant in alt-right online communities, closely connected with male-dominated nerd culture and fandoms like *Star Wars* (cf. Click, 2019; Scott, 2019). Nostalgia here serves merely as window dressing for far more sinister motivations. As Gary Cross (2015: 9) points out, in the nineteenth century with its rising nationalism, “nostalgia was hard to separate from heritage – national, regional, ethnic, and religious”, while today “nostalgia has become an even stronger theme in the cultural/political ‘wars’ that divide us ethnically, religiously, culturally, and politically.” Applied to a fandom already plagued with toxic attitudes, this nostalgia manifests as a yearning for the past where Princess Leia was the only woman in the galaxy, and Lando Calrissian the only black man. Anything that contrasts with that is seen as “PC culture gone mad” and treated as fair game for online vitriol.

¹¹ Lloyd was later diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and spent some time living in a psychiatric institution.

¹² Rather tellingly, Adam Driver (a white, heterosexual, cisgender man and a former Marine to boot, not to mention a well-regarded actor), who played the almost universally disliked character of Kylo Ren in the ST, was seen as entirely separate from his character, and did not suffer the same abuse, insults and even death threats hurled at Tran (an Asian woman), Boyega (a black man), or Ingram (a black woman). The violence against Tran (who played the character of Rose in the ST) was such that she deleted all her social media (cf. Sun, 2021), while the backlash against Ingram (who played the character of Reva in *Obi-Wan Kenobi*) forced the series’ star Ewan McGregor to release a video message condemning racist and misogynist attacks against her (cf. Cain, 2022).

Nostalgia works both constructively and destructively, and its affective signature can be both positive and negative, as well as a mix between the two (cf. Wildschut–Sedikides–Arndt–Routledge, 2006). Though nostalgia, as demonstrated, can be a negative force in media fandom, it can also work in positive ways. *Star Wars* itself is built upon nostalgia: the original trilogy, particularly *A New Hope*, is a loving, campy pastiche of old pulp sci-fi stories dedicated to Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers, Akira Kurosawa’s samurai films (especially *The Hidden Fortress*), spaghetti westerns, Space Age tropes and WW2 iconography. Lucas was inspired by the stories he read as a child (something that would also influence the later *Indiana Jones* movies), and decided to mix them up with Joseph Campbell’s monomyth, which resulted in a perfect Postmodern *bricolage* (cf. Vujin, 2023a: 393). Just like his fans, Lucas also relied on nostalgic feelings of childhood, only he used them to create his own stories, rather than letting them simply remain cherished memories. Here, nostalgia was a constructive, rather than a contentious force.

As the *Star Wars* fandom is predominantly affirmational (cf. footnote 10), its nostalgia heavily relies on tokens of the past to maintain its positive affect, which means that it is not limited only to the remembered magic of childhood experience, but also includes the material culture of that experience: toys (vehicles, figurines, Lego sets, etc.), collectibles, and other memorabilia. This is symptomatic of what Gary Cross calls *consumed nostalgia*, which is “rooted in special emotions linked to recovering memories distinctive to the objects of modern childhood and consumerism”, where “packed memories provide more than the symbolic and abstract representations of those lost relationships and experiences.” (2015: 17) Current fandom, which is incorporated (Fiske) by the industry, and which is dependent on SocMed and Web 2.0 to keep its IP content trending, makes intelligent use of this sort of nostalgia, nurturing rampant consumerism and even tacitly encouraging online squabbles and outright fights, since any engagement is a good thing. Seen this way, fandom seems to be moving away from Jenkins’ participatory culture of marginalised groups, and into the Frankfurt School’s cynical view of masses as cultural dupes.

To avoid ending this article on a down note, I will briefly turn to the positive ways nostalgia has worked to rehabilitate the Prequel Trilogy. For my purposes here, I could broadly define positive nostalgia as a re-examination of something that was once hated through a new, soft, nostalgic lens, leading to a positive change of opinion. As I already mentioned, the backlash against the PT, mostly among older, Gen-X fans, ultimately led to Lucas’ deal with Disney and his removal from *Star Wars*. The

Sequel Trilogy was eagerly anticipated, and its reliance on consumed nostalgia was so heavy that, it turned out, the movies had almost absolutely nothing new to say: all the cameos in the world could not mask the lack of originality and creative direction. Since the Disney era ultimately failed to deliver (*The Last Jedi* was contentious, *Solo* was largely seen as irrelevant, mediocre and unnecessary, and *The Rise of Skywalker* was almost universally abhorred – only *Rogue One*, a serious, self-contained story, full of, frankly, unmerited pathos and tonally entirely too different from Lucas' campy pastiche, somehow managed to achieve acclaim – which I personally find mind-boggling), fans have once again turned back towards the PT and now they see it in a different way. What was once considered terrible is now recognised as delightfully campy. This goes hand in hand with the current broader cultural nostalgia for the early 2000s, which makes the PT charmingly retro. Another factor is to be found in digital social spaces, mostly Tumblr, where users embraced the PT's loveable ridiculousness and over-the-top tone, and made it into one of the most recognisable sources of memes. The PT's endless "memeability" brought it closer to young audiences, who wanted to see the origin of such memes as "I Have the High Ground", "I Am the Senate", "For the Better, Right?" or "I Don't Like Sand" (cf. Prequel Memes). This is an instance where relatively new forms of online fandom work in tandem with positive nostalgia to bring about a change in attitude among fans.

When it comes to fandom harassment, only a handful of actors, like Natalie Portman and Ewan McGregor, escaped the PT stigma relatively unscathed. Hayden Christensen, for example, used to be reviled for his portrayal of Anakin Skywalker. Once considered one of the most promising young actors, he was never forgiven for *Star Wars* and his career petered out. Thankfully, unlike Jake Lloyd or Ahmed Best, he did not suffer mentally, though he too retreated from the public eye, turning to (of all things) farming and only occasionally taking acting jobs. Furthermore, Lucas' idea of what Anakin was like in his pre-Vader days was seen as bad writing, because it did not conform to the fans' expectations. Now, however – twentyish years after the fact – fans enjoy Anakin as an "emo drama queen," and Christensen is almost universally adored by the audiences, as evidenced by the huge support for his repeat portrayal of Anakin/Darth Vader in the *Obi-Wan Kenobi* (2022) and *Ahsoka* (2023) series. The reasons for this are twofold. One is the disappointment with the ST, and the resulting look backwards, which forced many fans to reconsider their attitudes to the PT. The other, perhaps more instrumental reason, is the change in demographics. As millennial audiences grew up, it was *their* childhood that became the nostalgic magic place; consequently, the PT turned from Gen-X disappointment into a

cherished memory of millennial youth. Considered thus, *Star Wars* fandom and its inherent nostalgia haven’t changed at all: we still uncritically adore the stories of our youth, and dislike the new versions that threaten to besmirch them.

Nostalgia, as Katharina Niemeyer (2014: 10) notes, can become “a way to transform the past by imagination”. Though, as Kant reminds us, we cannot return to the time of our youth, we can recreate it in our minds by clinging to the content that symbolises our childhood. This is where fandom comes into play: by participating in fannish practices, which can also include anti-fandom, we retain the connection with the imagined past. At the beginning of this article, I asked whether *Star Wars* fandom was really so much better before SocMed, or whether that impression was merely a side-effect of ageing. The answer is best left to the reader, though I have tried my best to map a pattern of *Star Wars* fandom and its nostalgic practices, both constructive and destructive. As both fandom and nostalgia are fickle and cyclical, the question remains whether some currently reviled texts, like *The Rise of Skywalker*, might also, like the prequels, undergo critical re-evaluation in a few decades, when fans who are currently children grow up and start looking at them fondly, through nostalgia-coloured glasses. Until then, we can continue to prefer the texts of our own childhood. As the millennial “fandom olds”, we have finally earned that right.

Bojana Vujin

„PRIJATELJU MOJ, TI SI JEDINO ŠTO JE OSTALO OD NJIHOVE RELIGIJE“ :
RATOVI ZVEZDA, FANDOM I NOSTALGIJA

Rezime

Nekada davno (mada ne i u jednoj dalekoj galaksiji), fandom i fan kultura bili su u najboljem slučaju deo studija kulture, a u najgorem, prihvatljiva meta ismevanja i pop-kulturni simbol Drugosti. Međutim, otkako su početkom devedestih godina dvadesetog veka akademski izučavaoci fan kulture poput Henrija Dženkinsa i Kamil Bejkon-Smit objavili svoje pionirske studije, fandom je stekao poštovanje (i postao izuzetno unosan) kao multidisciplinarna oblast izučavanja i profitabilni deo komercijalne popularne kulture. Ne samo što su danas fandom i štreberska kultura postali mejnstrim, nego su se udružili sa rizomskim internetskim platformama i stvorili digitalno doba u kome najvažniju narativnu ulogu igra transmedijalnost i gde su se priče pretvorile u „intelektualnu svojinu“. To se najbolje može primetiti na primeru *Ratova zvezda*, koji su nekada bili filmske priče koje je osmislio jedan autor, a danas su franšiza u vlasništvu monopolističke megakorporacije, sa brojnim autorima, pričama i narativnim platformama. Kao rezultat toga, fandom *Ratova zvezda*, koji nikada nije bio naročito gostoljubiv prostor, još se više podelio i okrenuo ka nostalgiji u potrazi za utehom.

Posledica toga je očekivana nestabilnost fandoma, čije različite grupacije smatraju da jedino one polažu pravo na autentičnost. *Ratovi zvezda*, dakle, obitavaju u savršenom liminalnom prostoru između obožavanja i mržnje, sadašnjosti i prošlosti, nostalgije i patetične sentimentalnosti. Koristeći savremene studije fan kulture, ovaj članak preispituje ulogu nostalgije u današnjem fandomu *Ratova zvezda*, sa naglaskom na medijskoj konvergenciji i kulturnim sukobima u digitalnim društvenim prostorima, čime se istražuje šira popularna kultura konvergencije.

Ključne reči: *Ratovi zvezda*, studije fan kulture, fandom, nostalgija, popularna kultura, digitalni društveni prostor

REFERENCES

- Bacon-Smith, C. (1992). *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Booth, P. (ed.) (2018). *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell.
- Cain, S. (1 June 2022). Disney and Ewan McGregor Condemn ‘Horrendous’ Racism Sent to *Obi-Wan Kenobi* Star Moses Ingram. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/jun/01/disney-and-ewan-mcgregor-condemn-horrendous-racism-sent-to-obi-wan-kenobi-star-moses-ingram> Retrieved 1 May 2023
- Click, M. A. (ed.) (2019). *Anti-Fandom: Dislike and Hate in the Digital Age*. New York: New York University Press.
- Cross, G. (2015). *Consumed Nostalgia: Memory in the Age of Fast Capitalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fiske, J. (2001). The Cultural Economy of Fandom. In: Lewis, L. (ed.) (2001). *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. London–New York: Routledge, 30–49.
- Gray, J.–Sandvoss, C. & Harrington C. L. (eds.) (2007). *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. New York–London: New York University Press.
- Hebdige, D. (2002). *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London–New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. London–New York: Routledge.
- Kant, I. (2006). *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Translated and edited by Robert B. Loudon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Lucas, G. (dir.) (1977). *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*. Lucasfilm–Twentieth Century Fox.
- Lucas, G. (3 March 1988). George Lucas testimony before United States Senate. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1988_George_Lucas_testimony_before_United_States_Senate Retrieved 1 May 2023
- McRobbie, A. (1991). *Feminism and Youth Culture: from 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Niemeyer, K. (ed.) (2014). *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Parker, R. (3 July 2018). Jar Jar Binks Actor Says He Considered Suicide After ‘Star Wars’ Backlash. *The Hollywood Reporter*. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/jar-jar-binks-actor-ahmed-best-considered-suicide-star-wars-backlash-1124848/> Retrieved 1 May 2023
- Philippe, A. O. (dir.) (2010). *The People vs. George Lucas*. Exhibit A Pictures–Quark Films.
- Prequel Memes. (n.d.) *Know Your Meme*. <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/prequel-memes> Retrieved 2 May 2023
- Scott, S. (2019). *Fake Geek Girls: Fandom, Gender, and the Convergence Culture Industry*. New York: New York University Press.
- Seibold, W. (29 June 2022). Every Single *Star Wars* Fan Owes Jake Lloyd an Apology. *Slash Film*. <https://www.slashfilm.com/874074/every-single-star-wars-fan-owes-jake-lloyd-an-apology/> Retrieved 1 May 2023
- Sun, R. (3 March 2021). The Resurrection of Kelly Marie Tran: On Surviving ‘Star Wars’ Bullying, the Pressures of Representation, and ‘Raya and the Last Dragon’. *The Hollywood Reporter*. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/resurrection-of-kelly-marie-tran-on-surviving-star-wars-bullying-the-pressures-of-representation-and-ray-a-and-the-last-dragon-4142178/> Retrieved 1 May 2023
- Vujin, B. (2023a). A Villain Most Vile: Darth Vader through the Ages. U: Lojanica, M.–Bubanja, N. & Kovačević, M. (ured.) (2023). *Zlobnici, zlikovci, čudovišta, psihopate*. Kragujevac: FILUM, 393–404.
- Vujin, B. (2023b). Otpor je uzaludan: *Zvezdane staze*, aktivna publika i rađanje moderne fan kulture. U: Đergović-Joksimović, Z. (ured.) (2023). *Anglofona naučna fantastika kod Srba*. Beograd: Alma, 131–145.

- WGA On Strike. (2 May 2023). *The Writers Guild of America*. <https://www.wgacontract2023.org/announcements/wga-on-strike> Retrieved 2 May 2023
- Wildshut, T.–Sedikides, C.–Arndt, J. & Routledge, C. (2006). Nostalgia: Content, Triggers, Functions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 91, No. 5, 975–993. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.91.5.975