EXPLORING IMAGINARY WORLDS

ESSAYS ON MEDIA, STRUCTURE, AND SUBCREATION

EDITED BY MARK J. P. WOLF

EXPLORING IMAGINARY WORLDS

From *The Brothers Karamazov* to *Star Trek* to *Twin Peaks*, this collection explores a variety of different imaginary worlds both historic and contemporary.

Featuring contributions from an interdisciplinary and international group of scholars, each essay looks at a particular imaginary world in-depth, and world-building issues associated with that world. Together, the essays explore the relationship between the worlds and the media in which they appear as they examine imaginary worlds in literature, television, film, computer games, and theatre, with many existing across multiple media simultaneously. The book argues that the media incarnation of a world affects world structure and poses unique obstacles to the act of world-building. The worlds discussed include Nazar, Barsetshire, Skotopogonievsk, the Vorkosigan Universe, Grover's Corners, Gormenghast, Collinsport, Daventry, Dune, the *Death Gate Cycle* universe, Twin Peaks, and the *Star Trek* galaxy.

A follow-up to Mark J. P. Wolf's field-defining book *Building Imaginary Worlds*, this collection will be of critical interest to students and scholars of popular culture, subcreation studies, transmedia studies, literature, and beyond.

Mark J. P. Wolf is Professor in the Communication Department at Concordia University, Wisconsin. His 23 books include *The Video* Game *Theory Reader 1* and *2* (2003, 2008), *The Video Game Explosion* (2007), *Myst & Riven: The World of the D'ni* (2011), *Before the Crash: An Anthology of Early Video Game History* (2012), *Encyclopedia of Video Games* (2012), *Building Imaginary Worlds* (2012), *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* (2014), *LEGO Studies* (2014), *Video Games Around the World* (2015), *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds* (2016), *Video Games FAQ* (2017), *The World of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (2017), *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (2018), and *The Routledge Companion to Media Technology and Obsolescence* (2018), which won the SCMS 2020 award for Best Edited Collection.

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Essays on Media, Structure, and Subcreation

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CONTRIBUTORS

Scott Adams was born in Miami, Florida, and is now living in Platteville, Wisconsin. Scott was the first person known to create the first commercial adventure-style game for personal computers with his first game, *Adventureland* (1978). His company, Adventure International, released games for many major computer platforms throughout the 1980s. Adams worked as a senior programmer for AVISTA in Platteville until 2016. Scott founded Clopas, the "PLAY the game! LIVE the adventure! CREATE your story!" company in 2017, with his wife of 30 years, Roxanne. Scott and Team Clopas are currently working on *Adventureland XL*, a Conversational Adventure™ game, in celebration of the original's 40th anniversary, with a holiday 2019 release. [scott.adams@ clopas.net]

Lily Alexander, PhD, has taught in New York since 2003, including at NYU and Hunter College, CUNY. She has a Master's degree in Drama and Film, and a dual doctorate in Anthropology and Comparative Cultural Studies. Her research interests include symbolic anthropology, semiotics of culture, creative algorithms, and evolution of consciousness. She has taught world mythology, history and theory of narrative media, comparative literature, genre studies, science fiction, comedy, story structure, screenwriting, interactive storytelling, and world-building. She has presented at 40+ conferences, including the MIT *Media in Transition* series and the forum *Cognitive Futures*. She wrote for the History Channel, henryjenkins.org, *The Journal of Narrative Theory*, *Cinema Journal*, and *Cinema Art*. Her publications also appeared in Italy, France, the Netherlands, Canada, Russia, and Israel. She contributed to book collections *Filmbuilding* (2001), *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds* (2017), and *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (2017). Lily Alexander authored a book set, *Fictional Worlds:*

Traditions in Narrative and the Age of Visual Culture (2013/2014). Her website is: storytellingonscreen.com. [lily.alexander@hunter.cuny.edu]

Helen Conrad O'Briain was born in Wheeling, West Virginia, but has lived most of her adult life in Dublin where she is adjunct Professor of Old English and Old Norse at Trinity College. She has published on Augustinian theology in early insular Latin literature, the Middle English "Breton" Lais, and Trinity Vergil incunabula, as well as on the works of M. R. James, Dorothy Sayers, and Phyllis McGinley. She is the author, with Laura Cleaver, of the forthcoming catalog of Trinity and Chester Beatty Psalter manuscripts. [conrado@tcd.ie]

Christopher Hanson is an Associate Professor in the English Department at Syracuse University, where he teaches courses in games studies, digital media, television, and film. His book *Game Time: Understanding Temporality in Video Games* was published by Indiana University Press in spring 2018 and his next book project is on game designer Roberta Williams. He previously worked for a number of years in video game and software development. His work has appeared in the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Film Quarterly*, the *Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* (2014), and *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon* (2014). [cphanson@syr.edu]

Jennifer Harwood-Smith has a PhD from Trinity College Dublin, and is researching world-building in science fiction. She has contributed two chapters to *Battlestar Galactica: Mission Accomplished or Mission Frakked Up?*, "I Frak, Therefore I Am", and "Dreamers in the Night". She has also co-authored "'Doing it in style': The Narrative Rules of Time Travel in the *Back to the Future Trilogy*" with Frank Ludlow, published in *The Worlds of Back to the Future: Critical Essays on the Films*. Her essay "Fractured Cities: The Twinning of Tolkien's Minas Tirith and Minas Morgul with Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*" has been published in *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Forest and the City*. She is the 2006 winner of the James White Award and has published fiction in *Interzone* and with Ether Books. [harwoodj@tcd.ie]

Andrew Higgins is a Tolkien scholar who specializes in exploring the role of language invention in fiction. His thesis "The Genesis of Tolkien's Mythology" (which he is currently preparing for publication) explored the inter-related nature of myth and language in Tolkien's earliest work. He is also the co-editor with Dr. Dimitra Fimi of *A Secret Vice: Tolkien on Invented Languages* (HarperCollins, 2016). Recently he has had papers published in *A Wilderness of Dragons: Essays in Honour or Verlyn Flieger* (Gabbro Head Press, 2018) and *Sub-creating Arda* (Walking Tree Publishers, 2019). He has also taught an on-line course on language invention for Signum University/Mythgard Institute and is a Trustee of Signum University and the UK Tolkien Society. He is

also Director of Fundraising at Glyndebourne Opera in East Sussex England. [asthiggins@me.com]

Matt Hills is Professor of Film & TV Studies at Aberystwyth University. He is the author of *Fan Cultures* (2002) and *Triumph of a Time Lord* (2010) among other titles. His work has been published in the *Journal of Fandom Studies*, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Science Fiction Film and Television*, *Participations: The Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, and the *Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures*. His latest book is the edited collection *New Dimensions of Doctor Who* (2013), and he's currently working on a new monograph, *Sherlock — Detecting Quality Television*. [mjh35@aber.ac.uk]

Edward James is Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at University College Dublin, working on early medieval European history. A long-term SF fan, he began writing about science fiction in the 1980s, and for fourteen years was editor of *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction*. He has won many of the awards in the field, including the Eaton Award (for *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*), the Pilgrim Award, the Hugo Award (for *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, co-edited with Farah Mendlesohn), the BSFA Award for Non-Fiction (for his website on Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers in the Great War), and most recently the IAFA's Distinguished Scholarship Award. His most recent book is on Lois McMaster Bujold. [edwardfjames@gmail.com]

Kara Kennedy is a PhD candidate in English at the University of Canterbury studying the representation of women in Frank Herbert's *Dune* series. She has published on the significant role that names play in the world-building in *Dune*. She also researches in the field of Digital Humanities and is looking to analyze 20th-century science fiction in new ways through digital technology. [dunescholar@gmail.com]

Lars Konzack is an Associate Professor at The Royal School of Library and Information Science in Denmark. He has an MA degree in information science and a PhD degree in Multimedia. He is working with subjects such as ludology, game analysis and design, geek culture, and subcreation. He has, among others things, published "Computer Game Criticism: A Method for Computer Game Analysis" (2002), "Rhetorics of Computer and Video Game Research" (2007), "Video Games in Europe" (2007), and "Philosophical Game Design" (2008). [mtw296@iva.ku.dk]

Edward O'Hare is a PhD student at Trinity College Dublin. After studying for a Degree in Philosophy, he completed anMPhil in Popular Literature in 2009. Since 2012 he has been working on a thesis on Antarctic Gothic

Literature, focusing on the Polar Fictions of writers including Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, H. P. Lovecraft, and John W. Campbell Jr. A regular contributor to *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, he has published articles and reviews on a range of subjects. His research interests include Victorian Gothic Fiction, Imaginary Voyage Narratives, Ghost Stories and other Supernatural Fiction, the Weird Tale, British and American Horror and Science-Fiction of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, and Cult Cinema and Television of the past and present. [ohareer@tcd.ie]

William Proctor is a lecturer at the University of Sunderland, UK, where he teaches in Film, Media, and Cultural Studies. His PhD thesis examines the reboot phenomenon in comics and film and was published by New York University Press in 2015. William has published articles and book chapters on *The Walking Dead*, Batman, and the fan reaction to the Lucasfilm takeover by Disney alongside a number of articles on the reboot phenomenon. His next pursuit is an audience research project focusing on fantasy fans in collaboration with Martin Barker and an edited collection which explores the impact of Nordic Noir. [billyproctor@hotmail.co.uk]

Mark J. P. Wolf is a Professor in the Communication Department at Concordia University Wisconsin. His books include *Abstracting Reality: Art, Communication, and Cognition in the Digital Age* (2000), *The Medium of the Video Game* (2001), *Virtual Morality: Morals, Ethics, and New Media* (2003), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (2003), *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation and Beyond* (2007), *The Video Game Theory Reader 2* (2008), *Myst and Riven: The World of the D'ni* (2011), *Before the Crash: Early Video Game History* (2012), *Encyclopedia of Video Games: The Culture, Technology, and Art of Gaming* (two-volume First Edition, 2012; three-volume Second Edition, forthcoming), *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (2012), *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies* (2014), *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon* (2014), *Video Games Around the World* (2015), the four-volume *Video Games and Gaming Cultures* (2016), *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds: A Subcreation Studies Anthology* (2017), *Video Games FAQ* (2017), *The World of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* (2017), *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (2017), *The Routledge Companion to Media History and Obsolescence* (2018), *101 Enigmatic Puzzles: Fractal Mazes, Quantum Chess, Anagram Sudoku, and More* (2020), *World-Builders on World-Building: An Exploration of Subcreation* (2020), and two novels for which he is looking for a publisher. He is also founder and co-editor of the Landmark Video Game book series from the University of Michigan Press and the founder of the Video Game Studies Scholarly Interest Group within the Society of Cinema and Media Studies. He has been invited to speak in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and *Second Life*; has had work published in journals including *Compar(a)ison*,

Convergence, *Film Quarterly*, *Games and Culture*, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, *Projections*, *Religions*, and *The Velvet Light Trap*; is on the advisory boards of Videotopia, the International Arcade Museum Library, and the *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations*; and is on several editorial boards including those of *Games and Culture* and *The Journal of E-media Studies*. He lives in Wisconsin with his wife Diane and his sons Michael, Christian, and Francis. [mark.wolf@cuw.edu]

FOREWORD

The original world-building, according to some of the most ancient texts that are still available to us today, is said to have taken place long ago when God spoke everything into existence.

It seems that this Creator was not wanting to just create a sterile puppet world that would only follow a preset program. There must have been a much deeper plan at work, since along with the Universe, He also created humans, and more importantly, as the ancient texts report, He made the latter in His own Image.

A very odd turn of phrase indeed. Many may take that to mean this Creator is an anthropomorphic being that exists in a state similar to our own and his shape is that which mankind owes its physical appearance.

There seems to be many issues with that idea. Perhaps instead it meant giving humans something very special. A piece of Himself in their very nature, so they could then truly reflect His ultimate Image.

If so, that piece may be Free Will with its very important offshoot of Creativity. Ultimately, though He was in overall control, His creation could do things as they desired within the reality He had created for them.

The articles in this treatise all have an underlying theme. They all look at the works of people creating worlds that did not previously exist, but even more interesting is they all look at works that were originally created for the entertainment of others.

The importance of the latter shows the very deep-seated desire that exists in people to not only be entertained but also for many the desire to create things that have never existed before, even if that creation itself is only imaginary with just tenuous roots in our reality.

Mankind has an innate drive to both create and to also be entertained by new creations. Speaking from my own experiences, nothing brings more joy to a world creator than seeing others also enjoy that creation. One without the other is useless. A creator wants an audience and audiences need creators. Perhaps that's why Humankind is even here?

Let's go ahead now and look at some of the more notable world-builders and their creations, along with how they touched the diverse audiences that interacted with them.

Scott Adams
December 16, 2019

Scott Adams is author of the Scott Adams series of adventure games and co-founder of Adventure International and Clopas LLC. Born in Miami, Florida, and now living in Platteville, Wisconsin, Adams was the first person known to create an adventure-style game for personal computers with his first game, Adventureland. His company, Adventure International, released games for many major computer platforms throughout the 1980s. Adams worked as a senior programmer for AVISTA in Platteville until 2016. Scott founded Clopas, the "PLAY the game! LIVE the adventure! CREATE your story!" company in 2017, with his wife of 30 years, Roxanne. Scott and Team Clopas are currently working on *Adventureland XL, a Conversational Adventure*™ game, in celebration of the original's 40th anniversary, aiming for a holiday release 2019. Adams's works include the classic Adventure game series of 14 games: *Adventure #1 — Adventureland* (1978), *Adventure #2 — Pirate Adventure* (1979), *Adventure #3 — Secret Mission* (1979), *Adventure #4 — Voodoo Castle* (1979), *Adventure #5 — The Count* (1979), *Adventure #6 — Strange Odyssey* (1979), *Adventure #7 — Mystery Fun House* (1979), *Adventure #8 — Pyramid of Doom* (1979), *Adventure #9 — Ghost Town* (1980), *Adventure #10 — Savage Island, Part I* (1980), *Adventure #11 — Savage Island, Part II* (1981), *Adventure #12 — Golden Voyage* (1981), *Adventure #13 — Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle* (1984), and *Adventure #14 — Return to Pirate's Isle* (1984), as well as *Return To Pirate Island 2* (2001), *The Inheritance* (2013), and *Escape the Gloomer* (2018), a game set in the Redwall Universe of Brian Jacques.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Mark J. P. Wolf

> I find it amusing, and secretly pleasing, that I have so many fans who are interested in the history. I'm not sure if they would so eagerly study real history, you know? In school perhaps they're bored with all the Henrys in English history, but they'll gladly follow the Targaryen dynasty.
>
> —George R. R. Martin[1]

It is probably true that there are fans in a number of fandoms — those of the worlds of Tolkien, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and others — who know the histories of their favorite imaginary worlds better than that of the real-world country they live in. Of course, one of the major differences between the history of a secondary world versus the history of the Primary World is that the former is always finite, and thus there exists the possibility of knowing it all; a mastery that is simply not possible when it comes to real-world history. The bigger the world, the greater the challenge, perhaps, but an imaginary world is always finite, despite all the gaps and missing pieces that allow fans to endlessly speculate and extrapolate a world. Rather than create a feeling of being unfinished, gaps and missing pieces invite participation and speculation, examination of a world's many details, and many return visits.

Our ability to explore an imaginary world varies greatly from author to author, medium to medium, and world to world. Some authors, particularly in the area of literature, see the world in which their story is set as merely the background for it; we are given only as much of the background world as is needed to advance the story, and no more. Indeed, this kind of narrative-centric outlook is even often taught to authors, who are told to keep moving the story along, like a horse with blinders being driven at full gallop. Others are more

leisurely and give their readers a little time to look around and experience their worlds, building more of it than what is strictly needed just for the story. Some, like Austin Tappan Wright, enjoy world-building so much that their worlds are arguably just as important as the stories set in them, which, of course, are often inseparable, as it should be. In fact, Wright so enjoyed world-building that his original draft of *Islandia* (1942) was around 2,300 pages or so when he died in 1931, not including another 135,000-word document about the world's history, and more appendices as well. It was Wright's widow who transcribed her husband's novel, cutting it down by about a third of its length, before finally getting it published 11 years after his death. Plenty of fantasy and science fiction authors have included appendices, glossaries, timelines, maps, and so forth with their novels, enriching the experience of the visitors who wish to visit them.

The medium used to represent a world also has a great impact on the visitor's experience. In audiovisual media, we often get to see a wealth of detail, some only tantalizing glimpses of wide and distant vistas that only hint at all the things that lay beyond the scope of the story being told; paths untrodden and places unseen which give rise to speculation as to what we may find there if we are ever allowed to return for further exploration. Some fans, unwilling to wait or frustrated at the limits of their visits, turn to fan fiction, exploring the potential offered by a world. Interactive media, like video games or virtual reality, go one step further than film and television, by allowing the audience to navigate the world themselves, often not without goals, challenges, obstacles, and nemeses. These vicarious experiences may explain why video games have displaced more traditional media like film and television, though they both have certainly continued to flourish as well.

Finally, some worlds are made with exploration in mind, regardless of the media in which they appear; plenty of world data detail is available, in every imaginable form, narrative and nonnarrative, through word, image, sound, object, and interaction, and every kind of object and experience one can offer (and often sell) to an audience. Naturally, it is these kinds of worlds, going beyond the stories set in them, which are most enjoyably and fruitfully explored, and are thus the kind to be examined in detail in an anthology like this one.

As a follow-up to my book *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds* (itself a follow-up to *Building Imaginary Worlds*), *Exploring Imaginary Worlds* is not only the exploration of imaginary worlds in general, but also the exploration of particular, individual worlds, a different one for each essay in this collection. Nazar, Barsetshire, Skotoprigonyevsk, the Vorkosigan universe, Grover's Corners, Gormenghast, Collinsport, Daventry, Arrakis, Chelestra, Twin Peaks, and the Star Trek universe are a wide range of locales, but they all share one thing in common; they began in someone's imagination and grew from there. Together, these essays explore the relationship between these worlds and the media in which they appear. Some are made entirely of words, while others are designed to appear in audiovisual form, whether on stage, movie screen, television screen, computer

monitor (with interactivity), or across multiple media venues simultaneously. Different media incarnations also affect world structures, posing different obstacles to further world-building of the world due to the varying requirement of different media venues, and the capabilities of different time periods during which the world-building occurred.

The essays present in this collection are each about a particular imaginary world, ranging in time from Ludvig Holberg's novel of 1741 to the *Star Trek* of 2019. After the Introduction, which examines what it means to explore an imaginary worlds, and the various pleasures and lessons it can provide, we have 15 essays arranged in 3 sections, each with a different focus. The first section, "Worlds of Words", looks at the earliest form of world experiences, literary worlds, which arose out of books, each written by authors who had to rely on words alone for the building of their worlds. The worlds examined here include Nazar, the world of Ludvig Holberg's *Niels Klim's Underground Travels* (1741) which is the subject of Lars Konzack's essay. This is followed by Helen Conrad O'Briain's study of Barsetshire, the imaginary British county which was invented by Anthony Trollope, and has been added to by other authors over the next hundred years or so, placing it among the early transauthorial worlds. Next, Lily Alexander looks at what she refers to as the "Journeyworld" of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Kara*mazov (1880), the symbolic, mythological world through which the characters travel. Finally, Edward James looks at the creation of the Vorkosigan Universe in the novels of Lois McMaster Bujold, who has continued adding planets to her world over her long career.

The second section, "Worlds across Media", expands out to worlds which are depicted in audiovisual form; my own essay looks at world-building on the theatrical stage and particularly in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938), examining the difficulties of world-building on the stage and how Wilder succeeds in producing an immersive world. Edward O'Hare's essay on Mervin Peake's *Gormenghast* examines its world, which has been adapted into various media, relating it to the themes of tradition and disintegration, and the desire to escape from history. Next, Andrew Higgins writes about the television series *Dark Shadows* (1966–1971) which was remade as a feature film of the same name in 2012, and the Gothic world-building taking place in it. The last essay of the section is on Daventry, a video game world from the *King's Quest* series of computer games (1980–2016), which Christopher Hanson examines.

The third section, "Transmedia Worlds", begins with Kara Kennedy's examination of the impact of the social sciences on world-building in Frank Herbert's Dune universe, followed by Jennifer Harwood-Smith's take on the topic of balance and interconnectivity in the worlds of Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's *The Death Gate Cycle*. The last two essays examine the recent extension of two long-running television franchises, which began on television and spread to other media; Matt Hills explores the continuation of David Lynch and Mark Frost's *Twin Peaks* franchise, after a hiatus of nearly a quarter century,

while William Proctor looks at the problems faced by the new reboot of *Star Trek*, and their solutions and repositioning of the franchise and the perils of pre-quelization. Finally, the Appendix, "On Measuring and Comparing Imaginary Worlds", is a reflection on the attempt to compare subcreated worlds with each other, how one might go about doing it, the problems encountered, and what may be possible.

Of course, the essays presented here have many overlapping concerns and together they provide the reader an exploration of world-building examples that extend over several hundred years, and through multiple media incarnations, including literature, plays, movies, television shows, video games, comics, trading cards, and more. Together, the essays demonstrate a wide yet related range of approaches and concerns found within Subcreation Studies, providing the reader analyses of worlds and the world-building used to create them. As their contributor biographies reveal, the distinguished set of contributors whose work is collected here come from interdisciplinary backgrounds which include the theory, history, and practice of world-building, the variety of which further enriches the explorations found in this volume.

While these essays may function like travelogues, introducing the worlds they survey, they naturally cannot convey more than a glimpse of the worlds they discuss, so they should be seen as invitations encouraging readers to make their own excursions into these worlds, perhaps enjoying them from a new perspective if they are already familiar with them, or enjoying them entirely as first-time visitors. Either way, it is hoped that these essays will not only aid readers in the exploration of imaginary worlds, but will perhaps even inspire them to explore other worlds, or even the *potential* of imaginary worlds, through attempts at building their own.

Note

1 As quoted in Gilmore, M., "George R. R. Martin: The Rolling Stone Interview", *Rolling Stone*, April 23, 2014, available at https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/george-r-r-martin-the-rolling-stone-interview-242487/.

Worlds of Words

1

THE JOURNEY OF NIELS KLIM TO THE WORLD UNDERGROUND BY LUDVIG HOLBERG

Subcreation and Social Criticism

Lars Konzack

Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754) is the father of both Danish and Norwegian literature. Inspired by Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Holberg, sometimes referred to as Lewis Holberg, wrote *The Journey of Niels Klim to the World Underground* (original Latin: *Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum*) concerning a journey into the Hollow Earth, published in 1741, and a second edition in 1745 adding the Apologetic Preface as the noteworthy change. While Ludvig Holberg, as playwright, wrote in Danish, he wrote *The Journey of Niels Klim to the World Underground* in Latin and published it in Leipzig in order to reach a larger audience and avoid reprisals in Denmark. *The Journey of Niels Klim to the World Underground* was Ludvig Holberg's breakthrough novel among the scholarly public of 18th-century Europe.

It is a strange work in the sense that apart from being a traveler's tale, science fiction, and contemporary satire, it is a work of high style and light comedy at the same time. It is the story of Niels Klim, returning to his native Bergen in Norway after ten years of study at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. One must keep in mind that Denmark-Norway was a dual Monarchy at the time. Inside the Hollow Earth, Klim meets the sentient and philosophical trees from the planet Nazar orbiting around a sun in the middle of the Earth. Holberg reveals a utopian society of sentient trees as well as many different sentient minor tree societies. Eventually, the government exiles Klim to the inner rim of the Earth's crust. Here he meets a sentient monkey society, becomes a slave, and ends up as a conqueror and a malevolent tyrant before returning to his home in Norway. His journey there and back again took 12 years.

What makes Hoberg's *The Journey of Niels Klim to the World Underground* interesting or even remarkable? How does it relate other literary genres like satire, utopian fiction, fantasy, and science fiction? What themes and content makes it distinct and why is it mostly unknown to the public?

Summary

The novel has autobiographical inclinations because the author, Ludvig Holberg, just like Niels Klim, grew up in Bergen and came to Denmark to study at the University of Copenhagen. However, the similarities stop there. In the year 1664, Klim examines a cave in a mountain. With a rope around his waist, he is slowly descending into the unknown until the rope breaks (Figure 1.1).

Klim falls, but suddenly comes to a halt. He does not crash down on the planet Nazar orbiting the sun at the center of the Earth. Instead, he finds himself floating between Earth's crust and the planet. The gravitational forces catch Klim and he finds himself orbiting the planet. A griffin attacks him and after a fight, they plunge down onto the planet Nazar. He ends up in the land of Potu (Utop(ia) backwards). Attacked by an ox, he climbs up a tree, which to his surprise, is able to speak and even move around. They are sentient tree-like beings with faces right below the braches and with up to six arms. Klim is taken into custody accused attempted rape of the mayor's wife. It becomes apparent that it has been a misunderstanding and Klim is sentenced to learn the native language.

Potu is the land of reason, a realm of sentient and very sensible trees, and comes closest to a perfect state in the eyes of Holberg. It is also the part of the novel with the most coherent subcreation, introducing the reader to how the Potuan society and the planet Nazar work. The subcreation of Nazar presents a
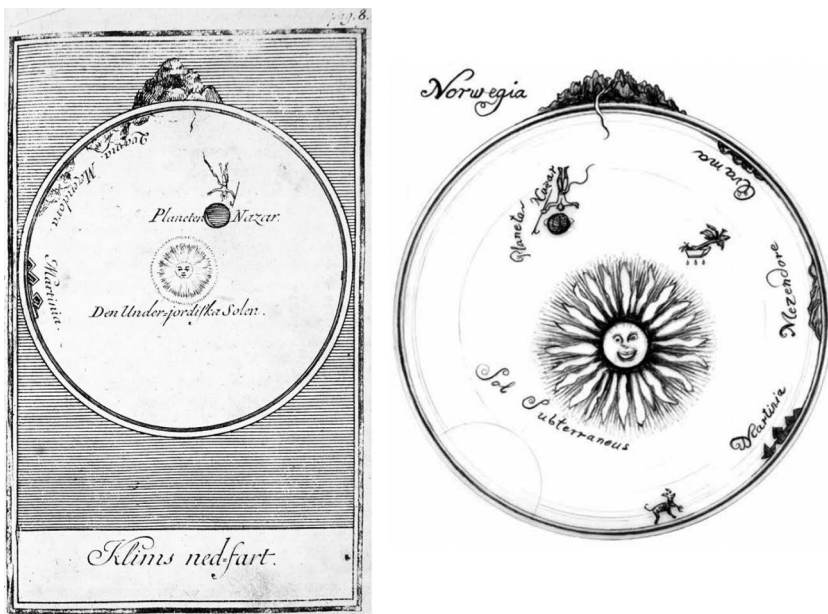

FIGURE 1.1 Map of the underground world.