Fantasy: An Exploration of Imagination
In the Ever-Shifting Fantastic Genre

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A Senior Honors Thesis by
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ABSTRACT

“Fantasy…” is an exploration of the literary genre of Fantasy, consisting of four main parts: an analysis of the genre, an analysis of Imagination, a reflection on exemplary works, and a study of criticism. Through an examination of many definitions, a working definition of the genre as “speculative fiction” is determined, and then applied throughout the thesis. A survey of what the genre consists of is taken, looking at various works and types, including numerous subgenres that fit within the working definition. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s theory of Imagination and Fancy is examined, alongside other views of Imagination in order to present the relationship between Imagination and Fantasy literature. The ideas of Imagination and Fantasy are then applied to exemplary works of Fantasy literature, including The Lord of the Rings and other Fantastic works. Lastly, is a reflection on the many criticisms of Fantasy, largely the debate of audience, and the notion of escapism, which leads to an understanding that Fantasy is an amalgamation of many things, and should not be underestimated.
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Fantasy. When expressed, the word evokes visions of the unreal, the unknown, the never-before, the only imagined. As a literary genre, Fantasy has undergone an evolution, changing and growing with shifting cultural philosophies. Throughout its history, there has been an ebb and flow of popularity, ultimately fashioning the way works are written. The differing decades provide collective masses of both works of similar style, and unique, outstanding examples of fantastic literature that soar above the rest, usually rising (or inspiring this rise) on the peak of popularity. Today, in the wake of another crest of popularity (due much to the rising fame and fortune of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series), Fantasy literature is blazing beside the steady sales of realistic fiction.

However, alongside praise lies criticism. Many claim that Fantasy is childish, meant only to be read by children due to its popularity amongst younger readers, its use of the fantastic and unreal, as well as its “lack of seriousness,” therefore pegging it as a lower form of art. Some criticize the genre of Fantasy for its elements of the unrealistic, making the claim for the superiority of reality. Yet so many writers and philosophers sing praise to the power of Imagination. Some, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, see the human Imagination as a connection to something divine. As he writes, “The symbols of imagination, in fact, are no tokens arbitrarily selected, but the spontaneous expression of the infinite mind in whose being it mysteriously shares.”¹ Many writers and lovers of Fantasy literature recognize this “spontaneous expression” of Imagination as necessary, for the genre requires creation and belief that extend beyond the boundaries of the typical realm of reality.

As with all art forms, Fantasy literature produces stellar models that rise above more earthy counterparts. Critics tend to either lump every model together in their definition of the genre, or denounce any work that tends to differ from an exemplary work. Over the years, there has been an underlying dismissal of the Fantasy genre as being a lower form of art amidst more classical pieces of literature. Fantasy is seen simply as popular fiction that sprouts like weeds amongst the gardens of literary flowers. Yet, not all Fantasy works are weeds, and not all “other” literary fictions are roses; even dandelions are enjoyed by some. The genre of Fantasy literature need not be labeled as a “lower” art form, as it has produced a wealth of fiction that is well read and celebrated by readers of all ages over the years. Some, such as J.R.R. Tolkien would claim it to be a higher form of art: “Fantasy is, I think, not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent.”2 As with any genre of art, if done correctly, or outstandingly, Fantasy can produce exemplary works of literature.

The genre embraces its identity of the unknown, generating stories and images that would never have arisen elsewhere. As a literature so closely linked to Imagination, it may very well be the “pure form” of Art that Tolkien presents. Through an exploration of the literary genre, its forms and history, and determining a working definition, as well as the idea of Imagination that Samuel Taylor Coleridge presents, I seek to apply these ideas to exemplary works of Fantasy fiction, and to debate the criticism of the genre, especially on the grounds of audience (including the argument over whether the genre is strictly for children) and the notion of escapism. Fantasy literature can be embraced as

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substantial literary genre, one which involves a number of elements to successfully allow for it to bloom high above other works of literature.

In order to explore the vast genre that is Fantasy literature, one must first determine a definition—what is Fantasy?

**WHAT IS FANTASY?**

**A Survey of Definitions**

Every writer and scholar of Fantasy literature has produced their own definition of Fantasy, usually providing a blanket term that encompasses a wide range of sub-genres. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “In modern use fantasy and phantasy, in spite of their identity in sound and in ultimate etymology, tend to be apprehended as separate words, the predominant sense of the former being ‘caprice, whim, fanciful invention’, while that of the latter is ‘imagination, visionary notion.’” The definition of Fantasy involves a number of meanings, including the psychological dream or hallucination, but the most applicable definition we are seeking is “A product of imagination, fiction, figment,” “An ingenious, tasteful, or fantastic invention or design,” and of course “a genre of literary compositions.” Closely related to the term “fantasy” is

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3 The word “fantasy” is etymologically linked to its Greek and Latin counterparts of “phantasia” and “phantasy,” which are related to the word “phantom,” which of course is an apparition or something that is not truly there.


5 Ibid. Fantasy 1. In scholastic psychology: a. Mental apprehension of an object of perception; the faculty by which this is performed. b. The image impressed on the mind by an object of sense. 2. A spectral apparition, phantom; an illusory appearance. 3. a. Delusive imagination, hallucination; the fact or habit of deluding oneself by imaginary perceptions or reminiscences. b. A day-dream arising from conscious or unconscious wishes or attitudes. 4. a. Imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present. (Cf. FANCY n. 4.) Also personified. Now usually with sense influenced by association with fantastic or phantasm: Extravagant or visionary fancy. (In early use not
the term “fantastic,” which in modern connotations is used as an adjective to infer
greatness or unbelievability, but is ultimately related to its root word, fantasy. The term is
used in genre criticism and scholarly reflection as a descriptor of the genre; its definition
as well includes an allusion to imagination. Now that we have a literal definition, we can
build upon this base to answer our question of “what is Fantasy?”

As a genre, Fantasy is often defined with a broad term by authors and scholars,
which encompass numerous subgenres that may or may not be considered Fantasy in a
more narrow sense. In Tolkien’s essay, “On Fairy-Stories,” he mentions that Fantasy
begins with “arresting strangeness.” Indeed, the genre involves something strange, out
of the ordinary, something ultimately different from the normal, or “primary world.”

Philip Martin, in his Writer’s Guide to Fantasy Literature postulates that “Fantasy is

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6 “Fantastic” in The Oxford English Dictionary. www.oed.com Fantastic A. adj. 1. a. Existing only in
imagination; proceeding merely from imagination; fabulous, imaginary, unreal. b. In mod. use, of alleged
reasons, fears, etc.: Perversely or irrationally imagined. 2. Pertaining to, or of the nature of, a phantasm. 3.
Of or pertaining to phantasy, in its various psychological senses (see FANTASY n. 1, 4) as denoting either
the faculty (and act) of apprehending sensible objects, or that of imagination; imaginative. b. Of poetry:
Concerned with ‘phantasy’ (Gr. φαντασία) or illusory appearance. 4. Of persons, their actions and
attributes: a. Having a lively imagination; imaginative. b. Fanciful, impulsive, capricious, arbitrary; also,
foppish in attire. Now in stronger sense: Extravagantly fanciful, odd and irrational in behaviour. 5.
Arbitrarily devised. Now rare. Cf. FANCY a. 6. Having the appearance of being devised by extravagant
fancy; eccentric, quaint, or grotesque in design, conception, construction, or adornment. b. Arbitrarily used
by Milton for: Making ‘fantastic’ movements (in the dance); hence in later allusions to Milton’s phrase. So
in Comb. fantastic-footed. 7. In trivial use: excellent, good beyond expectation. colloq. B. n. 1. One who
has fanciful ideas or indulges in wild notions. 2. One given to fine or showy dress; a fop. 3. A fanciful
composition. 4. Power of fancy or imagination. 5. That which is fantastic, strange, eccentric or odd.

7 Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 44.
8 Ibid., 44.
'speculative fiction.'" While this term is exemplary of the Fantasy genre, it also can encompass all other genres of fiction; all fiction, on something level or another, is Fantasy, then. For fiction without speculation, curiosity, and wonder would not be fiction at all, but a simple retelling of facts. However, Fantasy appears to include something more than just speculation.

Sir Herbert Read remarks on the definition of Fantasy in his essay "Fantasy (Fancy)." After examining a definition similar to the one presented in the dictionary, he writes: "A fantasy is more than a conceit, implying a sustained invention in the realm of fancy. ... Fantasy is an extraverted feeling: imagination is introverted feeling. If in pursuit of the extraversion of feeling, the mind turns to speculation, the result is fantasy." He continues on to distinguish between imagination and fantasy, which resembles the argument of Coleridge’s interpretation of Imagination and Fancy. Read would argue, then, that Fantasy is a result of speculation as well, a consideration of the unknown. Others do not place such a separation between Imagination and Fantasy, seeing them as interwoven elements of a creative act. As Ursula K. Le Guin writes:

What is fantasy? On one level, of course, it is a game: a pure pretense with no ulterior motive whatever. It is one child saying to another child, "Let’s be dragons," and they're dragons for an hour or two. It is escapism of the most admirable kind—the game played for the game’s sake. On another level, it is still a game, but a game played for very high stakes. Seen thus, as art, not spontaneous play, its affinity is not with daydream,

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11 To be discussed later in the thesis.
but with dream. It is a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence.\textsuperscript{12}

Le Guin strikes upon on all the right chords: Fantasy can be play, for the sake of play, an imagined event or being that is available purely for it unrealistic wonder, and Fantasy can also be art, a reflection of the real world through the lens of something Fantastic. The genre provides entertainment and morals at the same time, some more than others.

The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, wrote in his “Poetics,” “A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility.”\textsuperscript{13} Fantasy literature can offer a look into things imagined impossible, especially those works of literature that convincingly capture an imagined realm and ground it in conceived reality. The genre’s success is often based on its relationship with reality itself. Richard Matthews remarks: “fantasy, as a distinct literary genre,…may best be thought of as a fiction that elicits wonder through elements of the supernatural or impossible. It consciously breaks free from the mundane reality.”\textsuperscript{14} This “breaking free” can be considered an escape, which lends to the definition of Fantasy as “escapism.” As Wendy Mass explains, “escapism is the ability to leave the trials and tribulations of the known world behind by entering into a story so fanciful that it has no bearing whatsoever upon the events of one’s own life or existence.”\textsuperscript{15} Escapism in Fantasy is one of the most criticized elements of the genre; according to critics, escape deters readers from concerns of the real world.\textsuperscript{16} Despite criticism of escapism, it shall be acknowledged as a central part of defining the genre.

\textsuperscript{14} Qtd. in Fantasy, ed. by Wendy Mass and Stuart P. Levine (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 2002), 13.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{16} However, it can be argued over how deterred a reader may become.
In general, many define Fantasy in a broader sense, such as Kathryn Hume’s “Fantasy is any departure from consensus reality.” Under these terms, Fantasy can include a number of types of fiction, blending into other genres. As a literary genre, it is ever-shifting, herding numerous subgenres beneath its skirts. Some authors see fantasy as unlimited, an indeterminable genre. Others, such as Susan Cooper, see the label as limiting: “It seems to me that every work of art is a fantasy, every book or play, painting or piece of music, everything that is made, by craft and talent, out of somebody’s imagination.” In the broadest terms, all literature is fantasy; by imagining something that has not really happened, one is fantasizing. The genre itself is difficult to mold into a consensual definition, largely due to its ability to fit within other genres. Jules Zanger, a professor of English at Southern Illinois University, concludes:

Unlike lyric poetry or tragedy or the detective story, fantasy is not a self-contained literary type. Because it skirts between high art and pulp-fiction, because it emerged and flourishes without the significant benefit of academic commentary, and because its efflorescence has been so wild and gorgeous, it invites and resists the most painstaking classifications.

Despite this “resistance to classification”, as Zanger writes, the genre of Fantasy has some specific definitions. The genre relies heavily on the use of the unknown, or the impossible, incorporating surreal creatures, events and worlds to stimulate an imagined break from reality. As a specific type of literature, Fantasy books are normally shelved together under one common genre, as opposed to intermingled with the “realistic” fiction. What separates Fantasy from the other works (despite their common ground of a fictional break from reality) is the level of removal from the normal, ordinary world which we

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18 “Consensus reality” being the reality in which we as a society exist in, and understand, and “departing” includes anything that looks beyond the conceptions and events that have already taken place.
19 Susan Cooper, “Escaping into Ourselves,” in *Fantasists on Fantasy*, 286.
conceive. Fantasy includes a number of subgenres that distinctly classify the genre from the rest.

**Subgenres of Fantasy**

Similar to a simple definition of Fantasy, numerous authors and scholars provide different perspectives of subgenres, including different layers and thematic areas. For instance, Philip Martin, in his *Writer’s Guide to Fantasy Literature*, offers five types, or “golden rings” of Fantasy: High Fantasy, Adventure Fantasy, Fairy Tales, Magic Realism and Dark Fantasy.21 Others, such as author and essayist Jane Langton, offer eight types of Fantasy: Tall Tales (happening in the “primary world”), Travel Between Different Worlds (from primary to secondary, or vice versa), Secondary Worlds, Fairy Tales, Animal Fantasy, Time Shifts (such as historical time travel), Ghost Stories and Science Fiction.22 These types blend with Martin’s five, seeking placement in either one or several of his labels. Other authors include Comic Fantasy and Children’s Fantasy, as well as variations of both Martin’s and Langton’s lists. Through examination of a number of these types of subgenres, one may gain an understanding of what Fantasy literature encompasses.

What separates a substantial portion of Fantasy is whether the story takes place within the real world (that which we live and exist in, following normal rules of logic, etc.) or within an entirely separate realm. Some, such as Tolkien, call these two worlds the Primary and the Secondary world (the real world and the other world, respectively). The division between the two may be an invisible barrier, which houses each on either

side as they co-exist, or an entire universe, where a Secondary world may exist outside the planes of the Primary world. For E. Nesbit (whose ideas Langton borrows to explain her eight types of Fantasy), the separation of the worlds is envisioned as a piece of cloth:

There is a curtain, thin as gossamer, clear as glass, strong as iron, that hangs forever between the world of magic and the world that seems to us to be real. And when once people have found one of the little weak spots in that curtain which are marked by magic rings, and amulets, and the like, almost anything can happen.23

While Langton may describe the varying condition of the curtain for each of the varying degrees of Fantasy, it is simpler to look on either side of the curtain to determine the subgenres of Fantasy: that which exists within the Primary World, and that exists on the other side of the magic curtain, in the Secondary World.

Despite its status in reality, a large amount of Fantasy fiction exists within the Primary World. On one end of the fantastic spectrum is Magical Realism. Magical Realism often involves a fairly realistic storyline, but throughout the story, surprising unnatural events or interference occurs. Mysterious occurrences lead to change in characters, but are merely part of a natural world. As Sheila Egoff remarks, “The [protagonists] of enchanted realism do not change the world; instead they themselves are changed...”24 The work of Jorge Luis Borges and Toni Morrison both involve the use of magical realism, especially in such stories as El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan (The Garden of Forking Paths) and Beloved. Often characters in Magical Realism are tricked by the fantastic element, their foibles exaggerated by magic. As Philip Martin writes, “Magic Realism is the story form of ancient mythic tales, the literature especially of

23 Qtd. in Jane Langton, “The Weak Place in the Cloth,” 166.
24 Qtd. in Martin, Writer’s Guide to Fantasy Literature, 42.
Trickster, known to different cultures as Coyote, Anansi, Loki, Hermes, and so on.\textsuperscript{25} The Trickster is the catalyst in numerous stories, the character or god who is both foolish and wise, destructive and creative. As Alan Garner remarks, "[The Trickster is] the advocate of uncertainty...He draws a boundary for chaos, so that we can make sense of the rest. He is the shadow that shapes the light."\textsuperscript{26} Fantasy is an evolved form of myths, stories that ultimately began as an explanation for the way the world is, and why the mysterious things happen the way they do.

Magical Realism and myths tie closely into Tall Tales and their Secondary World counterpart, Fairy Tales. Tall Tales (or Folk Tales) happen within the real world, revealing events that are "unlikely, but not impossible."\textsuperscript{27} Every culture has a collection of Folk Tales, from the Pied Piper of Hamelin from Germany, to the Anansi tales of Africa (who changed into the Brer Rabbit on the plantations of America), and the stories of Robin Hood in England. American Folk Tales are usually those which fall under the name Tall Tales, and include such stories as Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill and Johnny Appleseed. Similarly, Fairy Tales emerge in numerous cultures as a part of their folklore.

Traditionally, Fairy Tales are the stories that begin with "Once upon a time..." and end "Happily Ever After," however, not every story began in the form in which they appear today. In fact, many of the Fairy Tales that the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Anderson compiled and wrote were originally more gory and violent that the watered down versions intended for children in modern times. These tales reside on the other side of Nesbit’s curtain for the most part, in a Secondary World closely resembling a time period of the Primary World, but introducing creatures and characters that are

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{26} Alan Garner, qtd. in Martin, \textit{Writer’s Guide to Fantasy Literature}, 44.
unreal, such as fairies, witches and enchanted animals. However, not all Fairy Tales involve fairies. As Philip Martin writes, “The name ‘fairy tale’ is misleading; only a small number involve fairies. The German term is Märchen, freely translated as tales of wonder.”28 These tales of wonder usually contain an element of the fantastic that acts as a catalyst for personal growth and change within a character. A transformation usually transpires, either physically or mentally; the ugly duckling becomes a beautiful swan, a plain, overworked girl into a princess, a toad into a prince. These stories usually provide a lesson, be they cautionary tales or their nursery room counterparts. As G.K. Chesterton writes, “If you really read fairy-tales, you will observe that one idea runs from one end of them to the other—the idea that peace and happiness can only exist on some condition. This idea, which is the core of ethics, is the core of nursery-tales. The whole happiness of fairyland hangs upon a thread.”29 In order to achieve “Happily Ever After…”, the characters must learn how keep the thread from breaking, often through a life-changing lesson. Similarly, fables provide moralistic lessons through a fantastic lens, often involving animals.

To return to the other side of the curtain, most Animal Fantasy exists in the Primary World. However, not all may exist in a world similar to ours, especially if the animals are anthropomorphized, such as in Brian Jacques Redwall series. Animal Fantasy expands well into the Fantasy genre, but also bleeds into others. On one end of Animal Fantasy lies the fable, best known through Aesop, which presents human characteristics in animal form, such as the greedy crow, or the cunning fox. Ann Swinfen, in her In

27 Langton, 166.
28 Martin, 39.
Defence of Fantasy, remarks that Animal Fantasy has been popular throughout history:

"The emergence of beast tales in the earliest days of European literature and their almost continuous popularity ever since emphasize the fact that man’s relationship with the rest of the animal kingdom strikes a deep chord of imaginative recognition in the human consciousness."\(^{30}\) Perhaps the largest driving theme of Animal Fantasy is that of the talking animal—people are eternally curious to know what life would be like with a speech gifted beast. As J.R.R. Tolkien notes, "There are profounder wishers: such as the desire to converse with other living things...Other creatures are like other realms which Man has broken off relations, and sees now only from outside at a distance."\(^ {31}\) Animal Fantasy does not have to exist in a Secondary World; the impossibility of a talking beast allows the Primary World to change.\(^ {32}\)

Animals may play smaller roles in Fantasy, such as the guardian beast, or the source of wisdom, but Animal Fantasy in its prime revolves wholly around the lives of animals. An exemplary work of literature that is often placed outside of the Fantasy genre is George Orwell’s dystopic satire, Animal Farm.\(^ {33}\) Most Animal Fantasy is revealed to be an allegorical vision of human culture, painted through a lens of animal culture. Another example is Richard Adams’ Watership Down. Through the exploration of the lives of rabbits in neighboring warrens, Adams portrays differing examples of

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\(^{31}\) Qtd. in Swinfen, 14.

\(^{32}\) Some, such as John Ruskin, may argue that Animal Fantasy is an example of pathetic fallacy, of which the aim was, according to Ruskin in his 1856 Modern Painters, "to signify any description of inanimate natural objects that ascribes them human capabilities, sensations and emotions." According to Ruskin, this was an "artistic failing," as art is supposed to be truthful representation, and anthropomorphic animals are unreal. Others disagree with this idea of "failing," seeing the application of human thought as a method of understanding the world, in this sense through a fantastic, animal lens. “Pathetic Fallacy,” in Wikipedia. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pathetic_fallacy)

\(^{33}\) I have chosen to keep separate dystopic/utopic fiction, despite its obvious connections with the never-before in Fantasy, as the genre is largely within its own satiric realm. It is indeed "speculative fiction,"
civilization, intertwining the true nature of rabbits with the societies of humans. As Ann Swinfen writes, "The best animal fantasies thus always operate on two levels: the animals serve as mirrors or models for human behavior, but at the same time they are also true animals in their own right."34 The subgenre of Animal Fantasy teeters on the edge of the Primary World, often crossing over into the Secondary World. A crossing from one world to the next constitutes a whole other subgenre.

The immersion of the Primary and Secondary Worlds appears in a number of Fantasy works. Langton’s discussion of the curtain differentiates varying stories through the upkeep of the cloth—sometimes the curtain is punctured, and characters leak through the hole into the other world.35 Perhaps the most exemplary of these stories is Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, where Alice quite literally falls through a hole into Wonderland. Sometimes this puncture in the curtain is a device, such as mirror (Alice’s Looking Glass), a door, a person (such as Barrie’s *Peter Pan*), a tree, a tornado (such as the one that took Dorothy Gale to Oz in L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*), a key or a wardrobe (such as the Professor’s infamous portal to Narnia in Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). Other stories do away with the curtain, and the two worlds coexist side by side. Often, the realms blend together in the Primary World, so that reality exists with a magical under/otherworld. Mary Norton’s *Borrowers* series resembles this blend, with the tiny people co-existing with “normal” humans. Another exemplary work of this subgenre is J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, and the simultaneous lives of Muggles and Wizards in the same dangerous world.

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34 Ibid., 43.
35 Langton, “The Weak Place in the Cloth,” 166.
Similarly linked to this facet of Fantasy is the notion of Time Displacement. The interruption of normal time is now mostly labeled as Science Fiction, but it also lends itself to Fantasy as well, playing upon the dreams, and visions of the afterlife. Whatever the vision, time is often a catalyst for the immersion of two parallel worlds. Ann Swinfen remarks that parallel worlds are often difficult to “present convincingly,” largely due to the demands of both worlds:

It has neither the underpinning of realism found in fantasy set entirely in the primary world, nor the combination of imaginative freedom and logical discipline which shapes the creation of the pure secondary world fantasy. Two worlds seen in parallel tend to clash, to contrast too strongly, to work against each other—making one or the other less credible, or undermining the relationship between the two. 36

Indeed, when the two worlds interact (even if they do exist in parallel), there is often chaos. The Wizarding world is determined to keep their events secret from the Muggles, for fear of harm (perhaps reminiscent of the fear of witch hunts from ages past) and the Watson siblings seek to stop the chaotic blending of a recovering England and nearly destroyed Elidor in Alan Garner’s novel, Elidor. Despite their coexistence, most parallel worlds tend to thrive on separation, and the upkeep of that gossamer curtain.

Crossing entirely over to the other side of the curtain, reigns the Secondary Worlds, perhaps the most well known and currently most popular form of Fantasy. Rising from a Fairy-Tale-esque wonder, the Secondary World expands from that archaic tales of enchanted forests and kingdoms into entire countries and continents with precise maps and geographies, histories, religions and languages. The more grounded in its own world, the more believable the Secondary World. The most exemplary of Secondary Worlds is

36 Swinfen, In Defence of Fantasy, 74.
J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-Earth from *The Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien created entire languages and histories for Middle-Earth, adding depth to the already immense story.\(^{37}\) Closely following is Lewis' Narnia, Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea, Lloyd Alexander's Prydain, and many more. Most importantly, the belief of the Secondary world is based on its relation to the Primary World. As Swinfen explains, "The secondary world, like all fantasy, requires a firm basis in primary world reality."\(^{38}\) The world may be imaginative, but there must be cause and effect for the way it is structured, much like the physical laws of the real world—what goes up must come down, what is born grows old and dies (unless it is immortal), if magical beasts exist, there must be a natural order of survival, if the sun is green, there must be some believable explanation.

Many writers unsuccessfully try to create a world of unimaginable oddity; however, not all Wonderlands are going to be accepted. Tolkien discusses this in his essay "On Fairy-Stories":

> Fantasy thus, too often, remains undeveloped; it is and has been used frivolously, or only half-seriously, or merely for decoration: it remains merely 'fanciful'. Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say *the green sun*. Many can then imagine it or picture it. But that is not enough... To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft... When they are attempted... then we have a rare

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\(^{37}\) The histories of Middle-Earth are not completely represented in *The Lord of the Rings*—in fact, they appear much like the tip of the iceberg, with only a portion showing. The other larger portion is presented in the posthumously published *Silmarillion*, which explores the mythologies and languages of Tolkien's beloved world.

\(^{38}\) Swinfen, 76.
achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode. 39
While some find the Secondary Worlds too far removed from their level of reality, some authors find that writing a Secondary World is the ideal form of Fantasy, as it allows for the birth a new world—the ultimate act of creation. When Fantasy worlds are created successfully, they can be considered an artfully crafted work of literature. Secondary World Fantasies tend to fall into two categories provided by Philip Martin—High Fantasy and Adventure Fantasy.

High Fantasy is perhaps the most thought of when Fantasy is mentioned, and the majority of the formulaic Fantasy fiction follows the path High Fantasy sets. Martin writes “High Fantasy tends to be set in feudal landscapes, with castles and baronial manors for the well-to-do, and peasant cottages for the rest. The stories swarm with knights, kings and queens...magicians. In high fantasy, these peaceful kingdoms are threatened by forces seeking to dominate, subjugate and oppress.” 40 This category of fiction is often seen as lofty, concerned with grandiose causes of the affliction between Good and Evil. Often, there is a journey or quest to eliminate the cause of Evil.

Adventure Fantasy similarly is set in this type of Secondary World, but there is less emphasis on the nature of the quest, and simply accepting the “notion of adventure for its own sake.” 41 The scale of purpose lowered, the final foe usually is not of extreme Evil, but simple Chaos: “Evil in adventure fantasy is not grand Evil personified, but a more obscure cousin: Chaos. In adventure fantasy, forces of evil (or uncertainty) are everywhere in never-ending supply: dragons, sorcerers, scheming barbarians, stalking

40 Martin, Writer’s Guide to Fantasy Literature, 34.
41 Ibid., 35.
Heffalumps. Unlike big Evil, Chaos is fluid, constant."\textsuperscript{42} Evil can be considered an indomitable force, which can be subdued, especially within the hero himself. Chaos is the unordered branch of Evil which can be defeated through order, setting the world right. Whatever the driving forces of antagonism, the battles faced by the peoples of the Secondary World are often magnified struggles of the Primary World. As Ann Swinfen reveals, "The inhabitants of the worlds are faced with problems of social behaviour, and above all with spiritual and moral problems, which parallel those of the primary world."\textsuperscript{43} If well grounded in believable histories and religions, Fantasy of the Secondary World can offer a reflection on the struggles of the people in parallel worlds. As a subgenre, this type of Fantasy has produced a large portion of the popular literature, some of which shines above the rest, and some which simply mirrors the light of the other.

The next two subgenres of Fantasy, Science Fiction and Dark Fantasy, are arguably genres of their own. The boundaries between Science Fiction and Fantasy are often cloudy, sometimes a well defined wall, other times a transparent fluttering cloth. The two are so closely interconnected, that they are often indistinguishable for classification and placed side by side on the shelves of bookstores, lumped together in one category. However, Science Fiction is different enough from the traditional forms of Fantasy to be separated into its own category. The genre focuses primarily on future modernized worlds, as opposed to the pre- to early-modern worlds of Fantasy. Science Fiction deals with scientific Imagination—"what ifs" based on the technological advances of modern science. Science Fiction and Fantasy can be placed on two opposite ends of an Imaginative spectrum: both are "speculative fiction." However, while Fantasy

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{43} Swinfen, 91.
speculates inward, Science Fiction speculates outward. As Martin suggests, "Science Fiction, however, speculates in a very different manner. The worlds of ‘SF’ are based on an extrapolated aspect of real-life natural laws."44 Granted, Fantasy is based on natural laws, yet Science Fiction is guaranteed to be based on the scientific laws of the real world. The genre creates new Secondary Worlds, striving to explain how they relate to our world of Earth.

While the idea of Reason is emphasized more in Science Fiction, and Belief more in Fantasy, both are needed in either genre for either to work. Science Fiction involves outward travel through space, and a belief in the workings of ships and space travel, as well as alien cultures is necessary, otherwise a reader will reject the story. Each genre provides extreme (and often not so extreme) ends of Imagination. Edmund Little, author of The Fantasts, writes "When Faërie is industrialised and given a technology, it is called Science Fiction. The machine replaces magic, technical jargon the spell or incantation, and the wizard acquires a labcoat to be called a scientist. Different types of magic, perhaps, but both are equally impossible."45 While science may be the magic of Science Fiction, the genre still falls under the broader ideas of Fantasy as speculative fiction. While technically a subgenre, Science Fiction is so far removed from the other elements that it seems more of an evolution of the genre than a subgenre—a modern or futuristic Fantasy.

The final subgenre of Fantasy, Dark Fantasy, is also one which travels along its own shadowed path. The curtain is torn, not between two fantastic worlds, but between life and death. As Jane Langton describes, "the dividing piece of cloth is a shroud, a veil

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44 Martin, 25.
between life and death. The dead pluck at the curtain, draw it aside with their wasted hands, and enter among the living.” 46 Philip Martin offers this label of Dark Fantasy, defining the subgenre: “Dark Fantasy encircles the historic core of horror and gothic fiction, but has grown broader and harder to define, sidling up to dark themes of sharp satire, urban decay, erotic fiction, and other edgy, marginal topics.” 47 This subgenre seeks the monsters of nightmares and horror, building upon a darker branch of the fantastic. It expands from classic horror such as Bram Stoker’s Dracula and Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, to modern day horror from Stephen King and Anne Rice. One author from a time between, H.P. Lovecraft, reflects on macabre fiction. Like Fantasy, this subgenre is speculative fiction, focusing on the unknown—in this case, drawing on the fear of the unknown. As Lovecraft writes, “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.” 48 For the majority of this macabre fiction, the unknown is Death, and the creatures who revolve around it—either ghosts or phantoms, or the undead such as vampires. This subgenre of Fantasy can also be a genre of its own, as it draws from a different aspect of Imagination. Lovecraft remarks, “The appeal of the spectrally macabre is generally narrow because it demands from the reader a certain degree of imagination and a capacity for detachment from everyday life.” 49 Yet this ultimately is true for any aspect of Fantasy, thus allowing this Dark Fantasy to remain another distant branch of the Fantasy genre.

46 Langton, 172.
47 Martin, 46.
49 Ibid., 35.
The genre of Fantasy literature encompasses a vast spectrum of subgenres, following the umbrella definition “speculative fiction,” which can be used for any fiction. However, Fantasy calls for an extensive use of the Imagination, beyond the normal speculation of realistic fiction, expanding beyond the boundaries of the real world. Fantasy encompasses varying degrees of the fantastic, thus involving varying levels of unbelievability and expanded Imagination. The literature may involve something out of the ordinary, enhanced by nature; it may leave the reader speculating the use of magic. Some Fantasy extends beyond the realm of the Primary World, either launching from the known to the unknown, or simply supplying an entirely new Secondary World. While similar to Fantasy, Science Fiction and Macabre Fiction employ the use of Imagination in other ways, branching out from the genre’s core roots of Imagination and speculation without severing from the trunk. Through this exploration of the subgenres and the many definitions of Fantasy, one can determine a definitive meaning. Fantasy is a literary genre which expands across many terrains, invoking varying degrees of Imaginative belief.

The connection between Fantasy and Imagination is clearly visible, though many speculate how closely related the two are in artistic nature. One such speculator is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Romantic poet and philosopher, whose *Biographia Literaria* focuses on his theory of Imagination and Fancy.

**IMAGINATION & FANCY**
Coleridge and Imagination

Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* is an attempt at blending his literary criticism with his philosophical ideas, as the subheading “or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions” suggests. He attempts to mysteriously define Imagination, determining how the mind is constructed and uses this concept, and applies it to a philosophy of art. As J. Shawcross remarks in a preface to the work, “His theory of the imagination, upon which his whole art-philosophy hinges, was primarily the vindication of a particular attitude to life and reality. This width of vision was fatal to his success as a specialist; but while it vastly increases the general interest of his views, it by no means lessens their value for the artist and critic.” Coleridge’s application of Imagination is sometimes criticized as remaining too enigmatic of a philosophy. Robert D. Hume, a professor of English at Cornell University, is highly critical of Coleridge’s piece: “Coleridge badly failed in his attempt; for more than a hundred pages he builds anticipation of his pièce de résistance, an analysis of Imagination, and then in Shandyesque fashion he evades the issue completely and throws his baffled reader the tantalizing sop of uninterpretable definitions.” Fortunately for Coleridge, other readers do not share Hume’s contention of “uninterpretable” definitions, and seek to interpret their meaning (which Hume eventually does as well). In order to understand his philosophy of Imagination, it is best to examine Coleridge’s definitions in depth.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was influenced both by the lingering philosophies of the Enlightenment (with its strong emphasis on Reason and rationality), especially that of the

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German philosopher Immanuel Kant, and the rising ideas of his colleagues of Romanticism (with its strong emphasis on Emotion and sublimity). In the *Biographia Literaria* (which was published originally in 1817), Coleridge meditates on the construction of the faculties of the human mind, especially that of Imagination. He posits that the notions of Imagination and Fancy are two separate functions of the mind:

Repeated meditations led me first to suspect (and a more intimate analysis of the human faculties...matured my conjecture into full conviction) that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or at the furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.\(^{52}\)

By separating Imagination and Fancy, he is raising one above the other, exalting one mode as more powerful, a method of the formulation of pure ideas, as opposed to the symbolic representation of these ideas. But what are his definitions of Imagination and Fancy?

At the very end of the first volume of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge supplies the reader with a long awaited reflection on Imagination and Fancy (the *pièce de résistance* to which Hume refers), and distinctly defines his two separate functions. Of Imagination, he writes:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition of the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates,
in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as objects*) are essentially fixed and dead.\(^{53}\)

Imagination, it seems, is separated by degrees of perception and creation. One can be seen as the all-creative Imagination, the part of the mind that allows humans to perceive the unknown, the “eternal act of creation.” It reflects humanity’s relationship with the Divine, allowing the repetition of the first action of creation. The other is more closely tied to the perception of things, allowing the mind to envision objects in relation to understanding them. Of Fancy, he writes:

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by the empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.\(^{54}\)

Fancy, it seems, is not created, but merely mirroring already created ideas and objects, playing with “fixities and definites.” Fancy is similar to Imagination, but in the eyes of Coleridge, a lower function of creation, a lower display of art. He remarks that there is a distinction between literary minds—Milton was imaginative, Cowley was fanciful.\(^{55}\) A true poet expresses an imaginative or energetic mind. He writes “In energetic minds, truth soon changes by domestication into power; and from direction in the discrimination and appraisal of the product, becomes influencive in the production. To admire on principle, is the only way to imitate without loss of originality.”\(^{56}\) This notion of a separation

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\(^{53}\) Ibid., 202.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 202.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 62.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 62.
between literary types can be applied to the genre of Fantasy using the lens of Coleridge’s theory of Imagination; however, it is necessary to understand this theory better before application. Many are fascinated by Coleridge’s theory, and often use him as a basis for their own interpretation of Imagination and Fancy.

I.A. Richards explores the theory of Coleridgean Imagination in his book *Coleridge on Imagination*, laying the Romantic’s idea alongside other postulations of Imagination. He offers the “ancient” sense of Imagination contrasted with imitation: “Imagination, in this sense, goes beyond, outdoes reproduction to present to the mind what has not been and cannot be known.” In this sense, then, Imagination is the formulation of images beyond what is normally comprehended, and Fancy, according to Coleridge, is merely imitation. Imagination creates a new reality, while Fancy simply mimics the normal reality. As the Greek sophist Philostratus remarks, “[I]mitation will fashion what is has seen, but imagination goes on to what it has not seen, which will assume as the standard of the reality.” Imagination here resides separately from other facets of the mind, such as Fancy, and in varying degrees, according to Coleridge.

Richards reflects on this bi-layer of Imagination. The Primary Imagination, he explains, “is normal perception that produces the usual world of the senses.” Secondary Imagination, on the other hand “re-forming this world [of the senses], gives us not only poetry—in the limited sense in which literary critics concern themselves with—but every aspect of the routine world in which it is invested with other values than these necessary for our bare continuance as living beings.”

Robert Hume suggests that Coleridge’s

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58 Ibid., 25.
59 Ibid., 58.
60 Ibid., 58.
theory of dual Imagination stems from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, as presented in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant is also interested in the construction of the mind, and offers three stages in the “cognitive production of concepts.” These stages are Sensibility, Imagination and Intellect. Sensibility is the “faculty which permits us to receive external stimulus,” mainly the senses that allow us to perceive objects. Hume continues Kant’s theory, explaining “Since sensa by themselves neither persist nor recur, the reproductive Imagination... must synthesize and reproduce them as needed.” The final step is Intellect, or Understanding, which happens from a synthesis of perception and imagination. However, before complete Understanding, there is the second part of Imagination, the productive Imagination. Productive Imagination allows for the connection of the concepts and images formed by the first two of Kant’s stages: “Roughly speaking, productive Imagination arranges and presents the material of the ‘selective’ manifold of reproduction in such a way that Understanding can complete the cognitive synthesis.” Without Imagination, there would be no way of connecting the Senses to Understanding, which uses Reason to place objects in order, but not create. Both Kant and Coleridge offer a dual level of Imagination, linking one to understanding and the other to creativity.

Coleridge makes a distinction between Imagination and Fancy, which Richards reflects upon: “In Imagination the mind is growing; in Fancy it is merely reassembling products of its past creation, stereotyped as objects and obeying, as ‘fixities and

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62 Ibid., 487.
63 Ibid., 487.
64 Ibid., 487.
It is often perceived that Fancy is the lower of the two, as it rearranges ideas without creating them, however, this is not to diminish Fancy to the depths of unwanted ideas. While as a Romantic poet, Coleridge sought for the higher Truth and sublime visions of Nature, he could still see the use of Fancy, the representations of these truths in such art forms like poetry. Indeed, the two, Imagination and Fancy, work together; Coleridge writes in *Table Talk* “Imagination must have fancy, in fact the higher intellectual powers can only act through corresponding energy of the lower.”

Fancy can present depictions of the unknown already discovered through the Imagination, but never exactly the complete unknown. As Hume remarks, “Although Fancy cannot, by definition, transcend the material world to offer higher truth, there is no reason as to suppose that it cannot be used seriously as well as frivolously.” Fancy may be lower than Imagination in Coleridge’s theory, but this does not necessitate it lack of function, its reflection of the already Imagined.

While some interpreters of Coleridge follow his distinction of Imagination and Fancy, others find the separation too far removed. To some, Fancy is a part of Imagination, not a separate function. Professor Lascelles Abercrombie posits that “Fancy is nothing but a degree of imagination; and the degree of it concerns, not the quality of the imagery, but the quality and force of the emotion symbolized by the imagery.” Fancy, then is a function of Imagination, instead of a lower, detached mode of thought which mimics its higher counterpart. John Livingston Lowes, author of *The Road to Xanadu*, joins the two together:

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65 Richards, 59.
66 Ibid., 75.
67 Robert Hume, 493.
68 Qtd. in Richards, 35.
But I have long had the feeling, which this study has matured to a conviction, that Fancy and Imagination are not two powers at all, but one. The valid distinction which exists between them lies, not in the materials with which they operate, but in the degree of intensity of the operant power itself. Working at high tension, the imaginative energy assimilates and transmutes; keyed low, the same energy aggregates and yokes together those images which, at the highest pitch, it merges indissolubly into one.69

The dispensing of Imaginative energy varies, therefore providing multiple levels of Imagination, extending from the purest form of Imagination to the basest Fancy and daydream. Each resides along a continuum of Imagination, presenting different levels of clarity for visions of the unknown. Where, we may ask, does Fantasy reside?

**Fantasy and Imagination**

The relationship of Fantasy and Imagination, while obviously visible, is debatable through the Coleridgean lens of Imagination. Traditionally, critics view Fantasy literature as a type of Fancy, something merely reflecting ideas and events formed in the Imagination. Others view Fantasy in the different light, claiming it to be one of the most brilliantly expressed forms of Imagination. Either way, Fantasy stimulates some connection to Imagination.

Sir Herbert Read ponders over the relationship of Fantasy to Imagination in his essay “Fantasy (Fancy).” As mentioned before, “A fantasy is more than a conceit, implying a sustained invention in the realm of fancy.”70 Read follows Coleridge’s separation of Fancy and Imagination, laying Fantasy down as a product of Fancy,

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70 Sir Herbert Read, “Fantasy (Fancy),” in *Fantasists on Fantasy*, 44.
something more definite than the product of Imagination. He writes: “Fantasy may be visionary, but it is deliberate and rational; imagination is sensuous and symbolic...Fantasy may be identified with fancy, though it is customary to apply the word fancy to the mental activity as such, the word fantasy to the product of that activity.”\(^71\) He argues that the purest form of Fantasy is the fairy-tale, with is its attention to objectivity and arbitrariness (which link to Coleridgean Fancy’s “fixities and definites” and the “mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space”).\(^72\) He distinguishes a number of works for their degrees of pure fantasy, such as Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and The Thousand and One Nights, claiming “Real fantasy is [bold]...it dispenses with all logic and habit and relies on the force of wonder alone.”\(^73\) Ultimately, Read’s interpretation of Fancy, while following Coleridge’s definition of the function, differs in its status—to him, “fancy and imagination are rather to be regarded as equal and opposite faculties,” steering away from the Romantic idealization of Imagination above Fancy, and placing them together on a continuum of speculative thought.\(^74\)

Modern criticism of Imagination tends to lean toward a more integrated connection of Fancy/Fantasy and Imagination, placing them on same line with varying degrees of power. J.R.R. Tolkien, well known Fantasy writer and scholar, offers his own interpretation of Imagination in his essay “On Fairy-Stories.” He writes:

...in recent times, in technical not normal language, Imagination has often been held to be something higher than the mere image-making, ascribed to the operations of Fancy (a reduced and depreciatory form of the older word Fantasy); an attempt is thus made to restrict, I should say misapply,
Imagination to 'the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.'

To Tolkien, Imagination is the mental power of image-making, and all varying levels of perception of these images. He disagrees with Coleridge’s separation of Fancy from Imagination: "The perception of the image, the grasp of its implications, and the control, which are necessary to a successful expression, may vary in vividness and strength: but this is a difference of degree in Imagination, not a difference in kind." Thus, Fantasy is an expression of Imagination, one which displays images of the unknown through varying degrees of pure fantastic Imagination.

Fantasy is expressed through images that are considered Art, "the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation." The art produced is often fantastic, images of the unknown, reflecting a close tie to Imagination. While some may criticize the representation of the unreal, Tolkien praises this: "That the images are of things not in the primary world (if that indeed is possible) is a virtue not a vice. Fantasy (in this sense) is, I think, not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent." Fantasy literature, as a work of art, is often difficult to achieve. Writers dabble in the fantastic, creating images of wonder that are either too unbelievable, or too gray and flat. A flourishing Fantasy is one that creates the fantastic images, but retains enough reality for the world to exist within believable limits—it takes a brilliant act of creation, a vivid portrait of Imagination. As Tolkien writes, "Fantasy thus, too often, remains undeveloped; it is and has been used

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75 Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” in Tree and Leaf, 43.
76 Ibid., 44.
77 Some suspect that the difference in thought between Tolkien and Coleridge is due to their religious background, Catholic and Anglican, respectively. The idea of representation differs in each religion.
78 Tolkien, 44.
frivolously, or only half-seriously, or merely for decoration: it remains merely
'fanciful.' The artistic success of Fantasy literature relates to the writers ability to
portray a believable Imaginative world, with one sober foot grounded in enough reality to
keep the fantastic elements from loftily soaring into the Imaginary realms. A plethora of
literary works prove to be successful, but a handful demonstrates true Fantastic
Imagination.

**EXEMPLARY WORKS OF FANTASY**

“In art, the best is the standard,” writes Ursula K. Le Guin in her essay “From
Elfland to Poughkeepsie;” “In art, ‘good enough’ is not good enough.” As Fantasy
literature is a gleaming facet of the written gem of Art, it also adheres to this “best”
standard. The “best” of Fantasy literature (which is debatable by many—fans and critics
alike) is the standard which all other Fantasy works imitate. To escape any negative
feelings toward the notion of “imitation,” one need only be reminded of the oft-spoken
adage “Imitation is the highest form of flattery.” The imitators and the standards both
draw from literary tradition and collective mythopoeic thought to create a work of
Fantasy. As Jules Zanger remarks, “To treat each fantasy as if it were the first of its kind
is to ignore the highly conventionalized nature of its form and content.” What makes a
best fantasy is how the author portrays his or her connection to the collective Imaginary,
through a story told through a whole new lens of Imagination.

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79 Ibid., 44.
80 Ibid., 45.
81 Ursula K. Le Guin, “From Elfland to Poughkeepsie,” in *Language of the Night*, 84.
Undoubtedly, Fantasy literature has produced standards of the genre for immeasurable years. Often, the genre’s popularity ebbs until a new exemplary work arises and outshines all the other Fantasy works produced in that era. Sometimes, these works set off sparks of Fantastic Imagination, until readers are left with a literary fireworks display, fiction popping up left and right, and often imitating the first flare. So what, then, makes these works so exemplary, besides timing? If the popularity of Wonderland, Neverland and Oz has anything to show us, it is that an exemplary work surfaces from an exemplary world. While not all Fantasy fiction resides in this Otherworld, a large proportion of successful Fantasy draws from a whole new world. A number of other factors are involved in the choosing of “standard” Fantasy, including multidimensional characters, the author’s involvement with the world, and of course, popularity. The examples of Fantasy I have chosen also reflect a certain time period and societal shift in thought. These works were written or gained popularity during a time of change, on the cusp of Modernity and Postmodernity, the cusp or aftereffects of War, and on the cusp of the 20th and 21st century. These works, then, are Modern Exemplary Fantasy texts, and the first catalyst for this modern era of Fantasy arises in the form of Tolkien’s Middle-earth.

Frodo, a halfling Hobbit from the pastoral paradise of the Shire as he sets out (with many multi-racial companions in a Fellowship) to destroy the One Ring (which first appeared in *The Hobbit*, and was only portrayed as an instrument of the Dark Lord Sauron in the later work) weaves several layers of story into one gigantic tale of the struggle of Good versus Evil in a Fantastic lens. While Tolkien admits to an influence by Germanic, Norse, Finnish, Greek and Biblical mythologies, as well as Anglo-Saxon and Greek literature and epics, the story he writes in *The Lord of the Rings* is a work of pure Tolkienian Imagination. As Charles A. Huttar writes “Thogh written in prose, *The Lord of the Rings* is unquestionably heir to Western epic traditions, both classical and medieval-vernacular...Tolkien’s manner of working was not so much to imitate a model as to ladle his portion out of the great bubbling soup pot of mythopoeic motifs to which storytellers are always helping themselves.” Tolkien told the story of Middle-earth, a world so developed within his Imagination, that it is nearly a reality.

Tolkien’s Middle-earth is a world presented with great care, and with great depth of history, language and philosophy. There is so much history and language for Middle-earth, yet *The Lord of the Rings* merely presents one fraction of the realm within Tolkien’s vision. History and time begin outside of *The Lord of the Rings*, resurfacing as ages where different races (Valar, Elves, Men) rise and fall: “Tolkien’s four ages are not in essence distinct: they represent a continuous sweep of time, perhaps hundreds of centuries, dense with chronicle and demarcated into ‘Ages’ mainly by the restarting of the ‘tale of years.’” *The Lord of the Rings* exists within one Age, but the notion of history (and history lost) arises throughout the piece, from the crumbled ruins of other

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civilizations that the Fellowship pass on their journey, to the vast array of races that appear from lands beyond the Shire.

These races, such as the Elves, speak in languages so intricate that Tolkien’s linguistic expertise shines through. The story is a place where Tolkien could place his Imagined languages alongside peoples within an Imagined world. As Ursula K. Le Guin remarks, “Tolkien...in a sense wrote The Lord of the Rings to give his invented languages somebody to speak them.”86 The speakers of these languages, as well as those languages we recognize, the inhabitants of Middle-earth, are some of the most well known characters in Fantasy literature. Tolkien’s characters are not without flaws—while Legolas and his elven brethren may seem the perfect race, the majority of the elves leave Middle-earth, unable to truly face the evil of Sauron, and the passing of another Age. Aragorn is at first an unsure heir to the throne, and the hobbit Frodo, the main character of The Lord of the Rings, is the powerless (yet successful) hero that sets out on a journey to destroy a ring that he ultimately succumbs to. The characters are faced with the unending dilemma of good vs. evil, something Tolkien has been criticized for simplifying in the form of Fantasy. However, as Huttar posits: “For Tolkien...good and evil are always present, in any age, as real possibilities: the nature of temptation does not change, nor do the roles played by ambition and greed, the tendency of power to corrupt, or the tension between submission and divine will and the lust to aggrandise one’s own identity in terms of opposition to the divine will.87 For the notion of evil cannot be ultimately destroyed, such as the act of destroying the Ring is often interpreted. Evil is merely dealt

85 Ibid., 93.
87 Huttar, 94
with—as Gabriel Marcel says "evil is not the problem to be solved, but a mystery to be encountered and lived through." The characters' struggle with evil is an essential part of Fantasy, one that draws in readers. As for the criticism of why such an epic battle be depicted in terms of Fantasy, I believe Ursula K. Le Guin says it best in "The Child and the Shadow:"

That it is told in the language of fantasy is not an accident, or because Tolkien was an escapist, or because he was writing for children. It is fantasy because fantasy is the natural, the appropriate language for the recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle for good and evil in the soul. This epic struggle in Fantastic form leant to a surge in popularity several years after the book was published.

During the 1960s, The Lord of the Rings rose in popularity, especially on college campuses amongst American students, who paralleled their society with the oppressive evil in the story. "Frodo Lives!" was emblazoned everywhere, on buttons, t-shirts and graffiti while the students "protested against the Sauron-like establishment that controlled modern-society." As John Strugnell continues, "Fantasy once again dramatised a social protest against those in authority. The taste for fantasy indicated an uneasiness about the way the modern world was organised." The popularity of The Lord of the Rings rose then, and then lowered to a steady interest, still popular amongst Fantasy readers.

Another surge in Middle-earthian popularity appeared during 2001, when a film version of the trilogy (directed by Peter Jackson) attempted to do on the big screen what Tolkien

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90 Strugnell, 176.
did for Fantasy literature. While popular, Tolkien’s style would be what Patrick Curry, author of *Defending Middle-earth*, would call “no longer fashionable,” even though, like Hugh Brogan, he finds his writing “capable of humour, irony, tragedy, and fast narrative, with only occasional lapses into cardboard grandiloquence.” Despite his epic style, Tolkien’s contribution to Fantasy is a large one, perhaps the largest reigning exemplary work of Fantasy in this modern era.

Similar to Tolkien is C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), a fellow Inkling from Oxford, whose *Chronicles of Narnia* are considered one of classics of “children’s” Fantasy. Written between 1950 and 1956, Lewis’ stories dip in between the Primary World (set in an era during the second World War) and the brilliant Secondary World, Narnia. While highly Imaginative, Lewis’ Narnian Chronicles, the most famous perhaps being *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, blend Fantastic elements with Christian symbolism and allegory, much more overtly so than Tolkien. Yet Narnia is not purely Christian allegory—it too began as an image in Lewis’ mind:

> Some people seem to think that I began by asking myself how I could say something about Christianity to children; then fixed on the fairy tale as an instrument...This is all pure moonshine...Everything began with images; a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent lion. At first there wasn’t anything Christian about them; that element pushed itself in of its own accord. 

While clearly Fantastic, Lewis’ Narnia did not provide quite the same impact as Tolkien’s Middle-earth had on culture, a smaller jewel in the Fantastic crown of the era.

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91 Ibid., 176.
93 Hugh Brogan, qtd. in Curry, 19.
After the era of Tolkien and Lewis, a number of Fantasy writers emerged, largely (but not strictly) British male authors. However, as the years continued, a rise in American female Fantasy authors appeared. As Kenneth J. Zahorski and Robert Boyer write, "Since 1965 the fantasy balance of trade has shifted from England to America, and the male-dominated genre of the first half of the century is now dominated by a number of excellent women fantasists."95 One of these women fantasists is Ursula K. Le Guin, author of the *Earthsea* novels, another exemplary Fantastic world.

Ursula K. Le Guin (1929-) is well known for her fantasy and science-fiction work, as well as her critical essays on Fantasy. Influenced by Taoist, feminist and psychological themes, as well as traditional Fantasy, Le Guin's *Earthsea* is a Fantastic world painted in a whole new light. As Norman Talbot states, "Le Guin rarely follows the pattern of a traditional tale, but there are sometimes illuminating resemblances and contrasts."96 Le Guin's tales of *Earthsea*, set in a pre-industrial culture residing in a vast world of water and an archipelago with myriad islands, mostly follows the life of the wizard Ged as he comes of age and learns to control the verbal magic, as well as his relationship with an evil power that haunts him. Originally intended to be a trilogy (published 1968, 1972 and 1974), Le Guin returned to *Earthsea* years later (in 1990, and again in 2001) to reflect a feminine perspective of the culture. While upholding traditional Fantasy elements, the stories of *Earthsea* are largely concerned with the culture and lives of the people, and of belief. Talbot writes, "*Earthsea* is a world that refuses to transcend itself, a balanced world always responding to the vitality of

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imbalance, a world where flight is as appropriate at one time as pursuit at another. Balance is challenged in two ways, by entropic process and by human ego-based assertiveness. The balance in Earthsea is complex, a new twist on the traditional battle of good versus evil.

Like Tolkien, Le Guin’s Secondary World of Earthsea is ripe with culture and history. While she may not have gone as in depth as Tolkien, with numerous languages and a posthumously published book of historical tales, the power of naming is central to the core of the world. The crafting of Earthsea is a reflection of the world’s magic; as Le Guin says, “Wizardry is artistry. The trilogy is then, in this sense, about art, the creative experience, the creative process.” Knowing the name of something in Earthsea is much like its creation—they are discovered. As she writes in her essay “Dreams Must Explain Themselves,” “I did not deliberately invent Earthsea. I did not think ‘Hey wow—islands are archetypes and archipelagoes are superarchetypes and let’s build us an archipelago!’ I am not an engineer, but an explorer. I discovered Earthsea.” Le Guin explored her Imaginative land of Earthsea for a number of years, and revisited again years later after a shift in ideologies, offering a new end to her tale of Earthsea.

Both Tolkien and Le Guin chose to end their series (sometimes after some reconsideration and reflection) and no longer pursue publication of stories of every era of every corner of their worlds. Perhaps this is a key to the level of work and the voluminosity of the story. Other authors of today, who largely work in imitation of a Tolkienian epic, have a tendency to continue their world’s stories on for generations and generations, one example being Piers Anthony’s Xanth, another being the assumably

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97 Ibid., 135.
ending *Wheel of Time* series by Robert Jordan. Sometimes a story continues on because the world has not left the author’s Imagination, and the tales are not yet over. Other times, however, an author is afraid to let go of their original world and let the story end, or to create a new world. Fantasy fiction is popular today, largely due to a call from the masses. Authors are creating epics shadowed by the “standards” of Fantasy, while others are carelessly churning out stories simply for profit. As Le Guin remarks, “undoubtedly avarice is one of the reasons. Fantasy is selling well, so let’s all grind out a fantasy. The Old Baloney Factory. But in many cases I suspect a failure to take the job seriously: a refusal to admit what you’re in for when you set off with only an ax and a box of matches into Elfland.” Le Guin, “From Elfland to Poughkeepsie,” 90. Whatever the reason, Fantasy has sprung forth in volumes upon volumes of books, little pop-cultural gems amidst the classical jewels of Fantasy literature.

One jewel that has taken on the limelight of popularity is the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. The *Harry Potter* phenomenon has taken the world by surprise, not only popular in English-reading cultures, but in numerous other countries as well. The story of a boy wizard named Harry, whose life is the epitome of the tragic hero, as he grows up in a boarding school named Hogwarts hidden away in the mountains of Scotland reflects both traditional Fantasy elements, and a new twist on the popular exemplary works. Harry’s world is that of our own—a late 20th/early 21st century London, which happens to have a dual layer of cultures: the Muggle society which we happen to inhabit, and the Wizarding World, which is where the magic appears. This Wizarding World, with its simultaneous coexistence and hidden away world of magic and schools, can almost be considered a Secondary World, but is ultimately a mixture of both. Rowling’s characters

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99 Ibid., 44.
100 Le Guin, “From Elfland to Poughkeepsie,” 90.
are quirky and deep, much more multi-dimensional than traditional sword and sorcery Fantasy. Perhaps these relatable characters are what draw in both a young and old audience to the world of Hogwarts and Muggle London at an unbelievable, exponential rate. Perhaps there is a societal need for Fantasy at this time, much like the draw of *The Lord of the Rings* to the students of the 1960s. *Harry Potter*'s popularity is both alarming and wonderful, as it reflects this societal need for Fantasy and draws in power to literature, but it also a popularity that lends itself to criticism, which is unfortunately a reaction to the genre of Fantasy.

**CRITICISMS OF FANTASY**

The genre of Fantasy has been criticized from a number of sources, some academic, though most criticism stems from other types of critics. Some criticisms arise due to a conflict with content and religion, while others feel it is a genre strictly left for children to read. Some parents find Fantasy unacceptable for their children to read, denying them anything that enhances the Imagination. Some stress that escapism is wrong, as it leads a reader away from reality. A number of these criticisms are actually why the genre is so well loved. What is it that makes Fantasy so popular?

Fantasy's popularity banks on several components, the sum of which is not entirely the whole of why the genre is successful. Firstly, Fantasy brings pleasure to the reader, through the mode of Imagination. To read, especially to read of unknown and exciting things, is enjoyable. Second, Fantasy offers social commentary and cultural mores, be they in an altered form—in the battle of good versus evil, good generally wins.
The heroes who win on the side of good are oftentimes the powerless underdog, yet he (or she) can also be complex (or flat) traditional heroes (or heroines). The nature of the quests can be individualistic, allowing for a reader to ally themselves with the actions of their heroes. Lastly, it is a form of escape, a pleasurable break from reality that anyone, young or old, can take. Each of these elements of Fantasy are seemingly attacked and defended. This last component, however, is one of the oft criticized parts of the Fantastic genre.

**Escapism**

Fundamentally, to “escape” is to leave, to flee from a captor or prison. *Escapism*, then, is an escape within the mind, a flight from the known reality away into mental solace. It is a diversion from the social reality, usually in the forms of entertainment. Fantasy is highly escapist, as it leads its readers far from their daily life. This escape is attractive to readers who seek to leave unpleasant parts of their lives, as they have the “ability to leave the trials and tribulations of the known world behind by entering into a story so fanciful that it has no bearing whatsoever on the events of one’s own life or existence.” However, escaping reality is often stigmatized. Anti-escapists ask numerous questions: Why leave when there is such a complex and delightful world here? Why disassociate yourself from your own society? Why are you unhappy? They see no need for an escape when there is so much happening in the present reality.

Yet, everyone needs an escape in some shape or form. People need to wonder, to fear, to imagine and to have pleasure, which are found in Fantasy literature. Critics see escape as a negative thing, yet to leave a situation is an innately human reaction.
Escaping through literature can offer pleasure, and a way to cope with grinding reality.

J.R.R. Tolkien remarks that "escape" is an incorrect term used by critics:

...I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity which 'Escape' is now so often used: a tone for which the word outside literary criticism give no warrant at all. In what the misusers are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in criticism it would seem to be the worse the better it succeeds. Evidently we are faced by a misuse of words, and also a confusion of thought. Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? ...The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using Escape in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and, what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter.  

It is thought that those who escape through Fantasy literature are separating themselves from their initial reality, but in truth, readers are wholly connected to the "real world" at all times. In order to read and understand Fantasy, one must have an understanding of Reality, for the two are intertwined. This criticism of escapism is largely laid upon Fantasy literature, as it is clearly a genre of the unknown and the unreal, yet all fiction is in some way escapist. To separate one’s self from the social reality through reading fiction, any kind, is to escape. As Eric Rabkin reflects, “Conventionally, escape, when used of ‘escape literature,’ implies a general evasion of responsibilities on the part of the reader who should, after all, spend his time on ‘serious literature.’ This is a pernicious dichotomy that derives from two misconceptions: first, that ‘seriousness’ is better than

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101 Wendy Mass and Stuart P. Levine, Fantasy, 19.
102 Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 54.
‘escape’; second, that escape is an indiscriminate rejection of order.”¹⁰³ Escape does not necessitate a rejection of order, but simply a reflection upon order of a different measure.

Some parents will sometimes assume that Fantasy is wrong for their children, as it leads them to pursue an escape with reality, leaving them unable to cope. As Jeanne Murray Walker remarks, “In fact, if fantasy as a form were merely a way of escaping, it might create problems for children, who need all the practice they can get dealing with a world that grows increasingly complex.”¹⁰⁴ Yet, Fantasy does not simply reject the ideals and mores of culture—in fact, the Fantastic tales teach lessons in the forms of fairy tales and fables, and demonstrates other types of societal structures. Walker continues, “But far from isolating children or encouraging them to escape from their social responsibilities, ‘high fantasy’ unites people into groups and reinforces the values around which those groups cohere. It might be argued, in fact, that if fantasy presents any danger, it is the danger of preparing the reader for obedient, uncritical participation in a comforting, authoritarian system.”¹⁰⁵ This concern of escapism in relation to children reflects another central critical point of Fantasy—it’s relationship with children.

**Children and Fantasy**

There is a dichotomous split between interpretations of children and Fantasy. Some believe that the genre is clearly only for children, as adults must show concern for more “serious” things. Others contend that children should steer away from Fantasy, as it deludes their vision of reality, giving them false ideas and causing them to disconnect

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¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 69.
with the “real world.” It appears that society is confused as to whether or not it should read fantasy—should children be the only ones to read this literature of Imagination? Should adults feel embarrassed for enjoying Fantasy? Should we not let our children read Fantasy, for fear it will overwork their Imagination, until their perceptions of reality are distorted or corrupt? While these questions arise in numerous cultures, they seem to always be percolating within American minds. Ursula K. Le Guin reflects on America’s aversion to Fantasy in her essay “Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?”

Le Guin perceives Americans as a people as not only “antifantasy, but altogether antifiction.”\(^\text{106}\) This is recognizable, despite the number of books and record book sales of Fantasy works like Rowling’s Harry Potter, in today’s society so centered on technology and non-literary entertainment. But some Americans must still be reading, for why else would we have bookstores? Regardless of this notion of “antifiction,” there is still a level of “antifantasy” that appears amongst some of the American society. Le Guin posits this is due to our own culture: “Such rejection of the entire art of fiction is related to several American characteristics: our Puritanism, our work ethic, our profit-mindedness, and even our sexual mores.”\(^\text{107}\) From a Puritanical viewpoint, Fantasy is pleasure, “self-indulgence or escapism.”\(^\text{108}\) This escape into pleasure is looked down upon, as it outwardly appears to be unproductive and straying from self-improvement. As Le Guin remarks, “For pleasure is not a value, to the Puritan; on the contrary, it is a sin.”\(^\text{109}\) From a business-orientated viewpoint, reading, especially Fantasy, gains no profit. Her third point, involving sexual mores, appears more complex, involving the societal constructs of


\(^{107}\) Ibid., 35.

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 35.
She writes “The American boy and man is very commonly forced to define his maleness by rejecting certain traits, certain human gifts and potentialities, which our culture defines as ‘womanish’ or ‘childish.’ And one of these traits or potentialities is, in cold sober fact, the absolutely essential human faculty of imagination.” According to this reflection, Imagination is seen as childish, an act that is only required in the minds of children. Following this line, then, mature adults see no need to use their Imaginative capabilities, as they already know how to cope with the world around them.

This ultimately is not so—everyone needs to use their Imagination, just as everyone needs an escape. Fantasy, with its tie to Imagination, is natural. As Tolkien writes, “Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity.” In fact, a healthy Imagination stimulated in children allows for them to become Imaginative adults, who apply their capacities to Imagine to problems in the real world, be they scientific or societal. Le Guin concludes, “Children’s imaginative play is clearly practicing at the acts and emotions of adulthood; a child who did not play would not become mature. As for the free play of an adult mind, its results may be War and Peace or the theory of relativity.” Children, then, should indulge their Imaginative cravings, and can usually do so by creating their own Imaginative Fantasy or reading Fantasy literature.

109 Ibid., 35.
110 Gender and Fantasy interconnect on multiple levels, but one which is overtly considered in society is that of audience. Readers of Fantasy generally are perceived to be the more introverted, the societally pegged “nerd” boys who deviate from traditional masculine pastimes, and the equally as awkward female equivalent. Fantasy is traditionally read by this audience, but is not solely limited to such a group. Anyone can read Fantasy, but not everyone chooses to do so.
113 Le Guin, 36.
An Imagination is necessary in children, as it assists them in learning about the
world that they live in. To deny Imagination is to extinguish a necessary instinct. It is
difficult to truly rid a child of Imagination—as Le Guin says, “I doubt that the
imagination can be suppressed. If you truly eradicated it in a child, that child would grow
up to be an eggplant.” Since there are a lack of eggplants living the daily life of a
human, it is safe to assume that Imagination is not wholly eradicated. However, the
human equivalent of an eggplant, a person who lacks the Imaginative instinct, do grow in
society’s garden. Fantasy allows children to develop Imagination. Some, such as Lloyd
Alexander, feel that Fantasy is an essential part of one’s diet:

Now I think we see fantasy as an essential part of a balanced diet, not only
for children, but for adults too. The risks of keeping fantasy off the literary
menu are every bit as serious as forgetting to brush with Gleem or missing
the minimum daily requirements of thiamine, niacin, and riboflavin. The
consequences are spiritual malnutrition, tired blood that even Geritol
cannot cure.

Fantasy teaches children numerous things, from societal workings to power of the
individual, as well as the distinction between good and evil. Most of all, it teaches them
to believe. Without belief, there is no hope, and an unhealthy balance of thought leaning
entirely to reason, resulting in apathy, and “cold-hearted emptiness.” A denial of belief
leads to an impairment of dreaming. Belief can be as simple as a cultural connection such
as Santa Claus, or as complex as religions. As Jean Sheppard, author of In God We Trust,
All Others Must Pay Cash, reflects, “Later generations, products of less romantic
upbringing, cynical non-believers in Santa Claus from birth, can never know the nature of

114 Ibid., 37.
115 Lloyd Alexander, “Wishful Thinking or Hopeful Dreaming?” in Fantasists on Fantasy, ed. Robert H.
the true dream." It is understandable when parents become concerned that their children may not know the difference between what is real and what is not, especially if that child over-indulges in Fantasy literature. However, children should know the difference, and be trusted to understand the difference. As Le Guin concludes, “Normal children do not confuse reality and fantasy—they confuse them less often than we adults do (as a certain great fantasist pointed out in a story called ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’).”

Just as Fantasy should not be denied to children, it should not be forced upon children. Some children do not seek Fantasy, while others embrace it. Some Fantasy is not intended for children, and is better read by an older audience. As C.S. Lewis reveals “…the connection between fairy tales and children is not nearly so close as publishers and educationalists think. Many children don’t like them and many adults do.” Some Fantasy is written specifically for children, some specifically for adults—much like cartoons and animated movies. People assume that just because it is Fantastic, or animated, it is designed for children. There are things that children must learn as they age, certain fears they must face, but they should never be forced upon them. As Ursula K. Le Guin writes, “…to unload adult despair on to one too young to cope with it is itself a psychotic act.” Fantasy, then, is sometimes written with specific audiences in mind. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy was intended for a more mature audience, as opposed its more childish prelude, *The Hobbit*. This is not to say that younger audiences

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116 Ibid., 146.
117 Qtd in Alexander, 146.
119 Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy…” 118.
did not read them, but that many believe felt a larger understanding of the world was needed in order to Imagine quite the epic.\textsuperscript{121}

A large percentage of Fantasy readers are young adults—juveniles, adolescents, teenagers, all entering into a time of change. Fantasy, with its focus on individual power, the weaker hero overcoming the impossible evil, the empowerment of the small, lends itself to their escape and their reshaping and understanding of the world. As Fantasy author Tamora Pierce writes, “One of the things I have learned about YAs [young adults] is that they respond to the idealism and imagination they find in everything they read…YAs are also dreamers; this is expected and, to a degree, encouraged as they plan for the future.”\textsuperscript{122} These young adults, in seeking an escape in Fantasy, tend to read vast amounts of the genre, devouring from both ends of the Fantastic spectrum, from the meaty classics and the snacky popular literature. Yet as the readers age, they seek believable worlds: young children may enjoy Dr. Seuss-esque oddities, but as they embark into Fantasy literature, most will be thrown off by an unexplained green sun. As August Derleth remarks:

A great deal of juvenile fiction is fantastic in character, and much of this fantasy is extremely popular…Writing fantasy for the juvenile audience has one advantage over that for the adult reader—the juvenile reader or listener is not likely to balk at accepting any setting, no matter how strange—but strangeness of setting and prose style will not make up for an ineffective story insofar as the juvenile reader is concerned.\textsuperscript{123}

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\textsuperscript{121} Ursula K. Le Guin herself admits that she was “lucky that I, personally, did not and could not have read Tolkien before I was twenty-five. Because I really wonder if I could have handled it.” “The Staring Eye,” in \textit{Language of the Night}, ed. Susan Wood and Ursula K. Le Guin (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 174.
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No one, regardless of age, will want to read a poorly written, poorly imagined and poorly
developed story, whether it is Fantasy or not. Many attribute this style to Fantasy, as a
number of stories in the genre are mass produced according to popular demand. Not all
Fantasy is “mindless fluff,” nor is it all classic epics. Fantasy is an amalgamation of
many, a blend of ever-shifting hues within the spectrum of the genre.

**FANTASY: An Ever-Shifting Genre**

The genre of Fantasy has been present in literature for numerous years, and tales
invoking wonder and Imagination were present in oral myths and ballads long before
Fantasy was written down. As Philip Martin remarks, “Fantasy has been around for a
long time and is likely to remain in the forefront of popular literature for many years to
come.” The literary genre blends into so many types of subgenres that all fiction could
be considered Fantastic in some light. The degree of Fantasy is based on how
Imagination is used—some works display use of pure Imagination, the “spontaneous
expression” that Coleridge defines, while others could be placed in terms of Coleridge’s
Fancy, playing with “fixities and definites.” Yet, all Fantasy, in some way, is linked to
Imagination. As Tolkien suggested, “The mental power of image-making is one thing or
aspect and it should appropriately be called Imagination.” Imagination is an important
mental facility, as it allows for readers of Fantasy to explore images and notions beyond
the realm they inhabit.

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125 Tolkien, 44.
New Fantastic realms are often the distinction between the standards and their imitations in Fantasy. A Secondary World grounded in history, language and belief, well rounded characters, as well as a compelling story are what make exemplary Fantasy literature shine about the rest. Other Fantasies tend to follow traditional trends of the genre, some successfully displaying pure Imaginative qualities, while others simply retell a Fantastic tale: as Le Guin writes, "Theft is an integral function of a healthy literature. It’s much easier to steal a good plot from some old book than to invent one."¹²⁶ The tales that invent a new plot, or reworks an ancient archetype until it is nearly new, are generally the classic Fantasy jewels that glimmer brighter than the other pop-cultural gems. Perhaps it is the connection to Imagination that provides this Fantastic light.

Imagination and Fantasy are a necessary part of life. Yet many see the escape they provide as detrimental to the development of social awareness in children, and the connectedness to the real world in other readers. Some parents seek to protect their children from the escape, and from the ideas and images presented in Fantasy literature. Some even go so far as to accuse the stories of promoting the evil images many Fantasy characters seek to destroy. However, children need Fantasy, children need Imagination, and children need to face their fears. As Rabkin remarks, "children need the cruelty (which is described with crystalline sharpness, never bloody gore) of grim fairy tales in order to learn, by seeing danger handled safely and symbolically, that their own fears can be mastered."¹²⁷ Fantasy teaches readers to deal with real world issues through the lens of the Fantastic. Not only does Fantasy provide a pleasurable reading experience, and an escape from the harsh fluorescent lights of the present reality, it reflects the tides of

societal interest. The popularity of Fantasy ebbs and flows, with new works arising as the fame of the last begins to fade. Fantasy as literary genre is ever-shifting, evolving alongside societal thought on both sides of the gossamer curtain.

\[127\] Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature*, 57.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX

Originally, I had intended to write a Fantasy work of my own alongside this critical thesis. However, as time passed, the pull of the critical exploration of Fantasy and Imagination lured me down its path, leaving my creative story behind, lingering in the shadows. It wasn't until I was far along the path of the thesis that I began my fictional writing, which I am hoping to complete partially in a fiction writing class, and partially on my own. I realized as I began writing that in order for my work to be successful, even for the small audience that is reading it first, that I needed to devote more time to strengthening and creating—Imagining—my Secondary world. What follows is the first initial pages of the current draft of my story, which I have called *The Sun and the Moon.*
The view from the highest window of Toren Delinde peered over an expansive canopy of oak trees that dipped and swayed like waves in the wind. Beyond the forest lay more trees, pine, as the rocky foothills of the mountains crept onward. Lunora stared vacantly out the window, having grown bored of the only scenery she was allowed to see days ago. Nothing ever changed except the color of the sky, an occasional bird, and the melting sun along the horizon. Gripping the cold stone frame, she hoisted herself to the window ledge. The wind whipped at her dress, flapping it against her legs, sweeping up to her hair to yank the sagging blue ribbon loose. The limp brown locks broke loose, pulled by the wind as it danced about her. She steadied her trembling legs, and looked down at the ground, which seemed an eternity away, and contemplated the repercussions of her jumping.

"I think the only one who would miss me would be that stupid Dragon," she mumbled into the wind, who whistled a retort back to her as it tore against the tower.

Lunora edged her way back into the room, sighing. Her movement kicked up a puff of dust in the unused tower room. The ancient bed, with rotting coverlets and yellowed lace canopy, had been unused for over a hundred years. It had collapsed inward when she had tried to climb into it a few days before, and mocked her from across the room as she sunk to the floor, curling her arms around her thin legs. The air was thick with the scent of age, and the rotting half a pig the Dragon Belinda had offered her the day before last.
“Stupid Dragon!” she scoffed. “You could’ve at least charred it a little with your ghastly breath!” The idea of raw, rotting sow seemed less and less palatable to her as her stomach gurgled in protest.

She tipped her head forward, resting her chin on her knees. It was no use crying again, as it brought neither edible food nor rescuer for the past five days. She blew at the wind dragged hair that fell in her face, then angrily tucked it behind her ears.

“Five days!” Lunora exclaimed, sitting up and slamming her fists against the wall. You could’ve sent someone by now, Daddy, she thought. We have plenty of knights...perhaps one of my brothers! Somebody must care that the daughter of the king was captured by a dragon!

She stopped at her last thought, and then shook her head. “Well, I guess not this daughter,” she mumbled, absently running her fingers along the blue satin of her skirt, torn from when the beast had grasped her in her claws.

Five days earlier, the Dragon Belinda, bored with simply eating cattle and deer, and scaring the nearby villagers, left the comfort her domain about the Toren Delinde to seek a prize. She reigned fire down upon a portion of the capital city, Lyre, demanding council with the king. The giant beast, silver scales glittering like coins in the setting sun, had gathered in the massive courtyard of the castle, refusing to leave until she received what she demanded. The king, a large man with a salt and pepper (much more salt than pepper) blend of hair and whiskers, who was reaching his upper sixties, lamented the fact that his eldest son was prancing about the East courting his young bride, and not on the throne. He approached the gleaming beast, who awaited him, curled on her haunches, tail flicking like a cat ready to pounce.
“Yes, oh great and wizened Wyrm who has graced us with Her beauty and gifted us with Her flames upon our city?” the king drawled, hoping flattery would keep the Dragon from striking.

“Spare me your niceties and drivel,” Belinda purred, her voice booming at her whisper. “I seek a daughter-maiden, your fairest, of marriageable age. Pure of heart, and of loins.” She licked her teeth, flitting the snake-like tongue between the sharp daggers.

The king blinked. “As you wish!” he sputtered, and ran inside his castle, gathering his four daughters together. All were of marriageable age, one to be married when the leaves fell. He glanced at his eldest daughter, whose stunning beauty, long, golden hair and sharp wit attracted many a suitor. Ah, but if only she were pure. The hint of a rounded belly peeked beneath her red dress. He looked at his youngest, the twins, who had just turned fifteen, eligible for marriage. They beamed at him with cherubic smiles, blonde curls falling over their shoulders. He couldn’t part with his favorite children. That left Lunora.

The tallest of his daughters, the girl’s pale freckled face and limp brown hair, and her dreamy stare left her an unmarried burden to him. Suitors asked for the alluring eldest and the fair twins, but strayed away from the girl with the grey eyes. She stared inquisitively at him. The king grabbed her by the wrist and dragged her to the courtyard. “Here you are!” he said in a shaky voice, shoving his daughter forward. “Lunora!”

The Dragon gently wrapped her talons about the girl, raising her to eye level. “This is your fairest?”

The king nodded emphatically.
Lunora scowled, just as she had then, clenched in the Dragon's claws. She poked her finger through a hole in her dress, longing for a needle and thread. "Of course he'd choose me. Plain, practical Lunora and her pitiable pallor!" She jerked her hand in annoyance, tearing the hole open wider. "Oh, damn it!"

Tearing at the enlarged hole, she ripped and ripped until the hemline of her dress rose to her mid-calf. She looked at the once lovely fabric in her hands, and screamed, jolting to her feet to throw the material out the window. "Argggg!" she called out the window, watching the blue fabric flutter in the wind as it fell to the ground down below.

The wind rushed past the window again, and she laid her dirty palms on the window ledge. The canopy hadn't changed since she last looked, the trees still dancing in the wind. A hawk soared on thermals and updrafts, its long wings hardly flapping as it whirled off into the distance, before crashing through the trees, probably targeting some prey. Lunora sighed, and made to turn away. Suddenly, a mass of birds fluttered wildly from beneath the canopy, bursting like little rockets from the forest. The trees in the middle shook violently, much more than any simple wind could manage. Lunora stared from the window, watching as the trees shuddered, the shaking traveling in the direction of the tower.

Charging from the forest came a man atop a white horse, his shield and tunic emblazoned with red and orange coloring, the chain mail helm atop his head a gleaming bronze. Lunora squinted at the foreign colors, used to the green and white of Lyratan knights. Was this a foreign knight who had come to rescue her?

Thundering seconds behind the horseman came the screaming Belinda, who opened her mouth and spat flames at the knight. He swerved away, narrowly missing
singeing his horse's fluttering tail. Leaping from the animal, the knight drew his sword, pointing at the growling Dragon.

Lunora could barely hear the tinny threat of the knight as he challenged the Dragon. "You dare to threaten me?" Belinda screamed, baring sharp teeth. She snapped at the knight, who tumbled to the ground, rolling. The beast swung her silver scaled tail, thumping next to the knight. The fiery clothed man rolled the opposite direction, then tried to climb to his knees. Belinda slammed to the other side of him, and he dove towards the tower.

His approach enraged the Dragon, and she cried a feral scream, the noise scaring up more birds from the trees. She leapt to the side of the tower agilely, her dexterous talons gripping the stone. Lunging with her long neck, she snapped her jaws at the knight, piercing the air next to him as he scrambled away, his tunic flailing after him. His sword lay unused on the ground.

"Pick up your sword! Pick up your sword!" Lunora called to the tiny figure down below, dodging the Dragon's teeth. Belinda launched from the tower, shaking the entire building and raking bits of the stone from the walls. She screamed again, casting flames at the knight. Lunora covered her ears, the scream deafening even at her height.

The knight scrambled for his sword, then ran around to the other side of the building. Belinda howled, eyes flashing red with rage, and leapt at the tower again, her claws digging and tearing at the stone as she scaled upwards. Lunora lurched away from the window as the Dragon neared, screaming as the blazing eye stared through the window. She hopped across the sunken bed, shuffling to the other side and covering her ears as the beast screamed again. "You are my prize!"
The door burst open, and the red and orange clothed knight sprang through. He glanced to see where Lunora was, then ducked to her side as Belinda forced her flames into the room. The knight pushed her down, covering her as the flames licked above them. Lunora’s heart pounded in her chest as she tried to press herself as flat against the floor as she could. The heat of the flames burned above, causing her eyes to water and making the air hard to breathe. She trembled under the weight of the knight, then tried to swallow her fear when he uncovered her. Peering over the bed, Lunora saw Belinda crash her talons through the window, crumbling the stone wall around it to fit her massive claws through. The stones showered upon the knight, who stumbled to the ground. The digits of the claw crept closer, and he climbed to his feet.

The knight ran towards the scraping claws, sword raised. He leapt upon the Dragon’s foot, stabbing, then pulled his sword free, and sliced at the sharp claws, shattering one off. Belinda wailed, yanking her paw out of the room. The knight scrambled towards the window, then launched at the Dragon. Lunora gasped as she watched him swing his bloody sword at the Dragon’s eyes, finally piercing between them. Belinda swung her head, and the knight clung to the sword as she wailed. Her strength failing her, the Dragon lost her grip against the tower, and tumbled to the ground with a tremendous rumble.

Then all was quiet.

Lunora waited, listening. After a few minutes, she jumped from behind the now charred bed, and scrambled to the gaping hole where the window once stood. Belinda’s massive silver body lay in a crumpled heap, her neck twisted in an ugly position. The head lay tilted to one side, but she could see neither sword nor knight. Clinging to the
wall, she leaned forward, craning her neck to see better. Suddenly she was lurched back into the room by a pair of strong arms wrapped round her waist.

“Hey!” she exclaimed, whirling around the face the orange and red clothed knight.

“You’ll fall!” the knight said, then coughed, wiping at the dirt on his face. It simply smudged more there.

Lunora stared at him for a minute, but he grabbed her wrist and pulled her along. “C’mon,” he said, coughing again as the dust swirled about, leading her down the stairs. She followed him, allowing him to still grip at her wrist. The stairs were as dusty as the room had been, leading to a few other rooms in the old abandoned tower, which were all closed.

“How did you know I was in the top room?” Lunora asked as they stepped from the tower door and into the sunlight.

“Dragons always put you in the top room. They like their prizes on the highest pedestal,” the knight said.

Lunora stared at him. “What’s wrong with your voice?”

The knight scowled. “Nothing’s wrong with my voice! What’s wrong with yours?” He ripped off his bronzed helm to reveal a mess of curly black hair that flopped wildly above the top of his ears. The lines of his face, beneath the dirt, were soft, the cheeks round, the chin small and stubborn, the lashes around the golden brown eyes long. Lunora towered a few inches above him in height.

“You’re a woman!” Lunora exclaimed.
The knight smirked at her. “Of course I am!” she retorted, pulling her fingers through her short curls, then shook her head as Lunora stared bug-eyed at her. “Okay princess, which way towards home?”

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Lunora sat beside her mother, who petted her hand as if she were a small child. While the short, rotund woman had made a fuss over her daughter’s return, she knew in the back of her mind that the queen was probably just as glad she had been offered to Belinda instead of her sisters. At her return, the knight had presented Lunora to her parents, who stared in shock. “You’re back?” her father had sputtered, then regained his composure and embraced her. Her mother had wailed and pulled her from her father’s arms, then ordered her straight to a bath.

“Lady-knight Sunniva, we are delighted to have someone so skilled from Silenia bring us back our beloved daughter Lunora.” The king spoke from his seat on his throne, facing the female knight as she stood before them.

“It was my duty, your highness.” She bowed, her mess of black curls shaking. She had donned a pair of tan leggings, and a gold-lined tunic, which bore the orange and red of her country’s colors. “And please, Sunne is fine.”

“Lady Sunne, we are most grateful for someone who has traveled so far from the south to rescue our daughter,” the queen hummed, squeezing Lunora’s fingers. Lunora looked back at her mother with a raised eyebrow.

“I was passing through the countryside. As I said, it was my duty as a knight to rescue your princess,” Sunne said calmly. “I ask only that you allow me passage through your kingdom as I conduct my business…”
“Ah! You shall have passage!” The king exclaimed, standing. “But you have earned an even greater reward!”

“I seek nothing mo—” Sunne began, but was interrupted by the king as he strode over to Lunora, pulling her from her seat.

The king led his daughter closer to the foreign knight. “There is a custom in our Kingdom! The law of Lyrata states that any knight who rescues a royal princess from a Dragon shall be wed to her!” The king grinned, shoving his bug-eyed daughter towards Sunne. Lunora blushed bright crimson. “Daddy…”

“Sir, I thank you for the, uh, hand of your daughter, but I must decline your offer,” Sunne stumbled, staring at the king, then back to princess Lunora, who returned the awkward stare.

“Nonsense, nonsense!” the man bellowed, clapping his hands on the shoulders of the two young women. “You shall be wed upon the morrow!”

The queen rose from her seat, bubbling happily as she and her husband began planning the event. Lunora stared mortified at Sunne, who suddenly matched the color of her tunic.

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Standing before the carved wooden cabinet of her closet, Lunora stared at her dresses, fanning one out and looking back at her new wife-husband, who sat on her large bed, scowling at her.

“No, no, no! Much too fancy! If you have to wear dresses, let them be plain. No flashy rubbish like ribbons or lace. And plain colors, too, if you have them.” Sunne bounced her leg as she sat, ordering Lunora about her packing.
“You wear bright red and orange tunics! How is that plain?” Lunora demanded, hands on her hips.

Sunne stood up to her full height, which didn’t match up to her companion’s.

“Those are formal. You think I travel in Silenia’s colors everywhere? Not everyone is as inviting as your father.” She rummaged through Lunora’s clothing. “Don’t you have any breeches?”

There was no great send off for the King’s homely daughter as she left with her new wife-husband in the chilly air of dawn. Sunne rode slowly atop her white palfrey, leading her stocky pony behind her, which carried their supplies and belongings. Lunora twisted the silver ring on her finger as she walked beside the pony. After a few miles of walking in silence, her legs ached and her feet screamed.

“Sunne?” she voiced. The woman ignored her. “Sunne!”

She grunted in reply, but looked straight ahead down the winding road that crept northward.

“Sunne, couldn’t you have asked my father for another horse for me?”

The knight looked down at Lunora, then stated. “He’s your father, why didn’t you ask him for one? He already gave me you. I think that’s more than enough.”

Lunora huffed and stopped walking. “You know, just because my parents patronize me, doesn’t mean you have to! I didn’t ask to be handed off to you!” Turning around, Lunora started stomping off down the road.

Sunne stopped and stared as she marched off in the opposite direction. “Where are you going?”
“Home!” Lunora shouted, then started stomping again.

“Stop, stop. You’re going to get lost,” Sunne called to her, walking her horse towards the fuming young woman. Lunora glared at her and kept walking. The knight guided her horse in front of girl. “Come on, Princess.” She extended her hand down to the staring Lunora. “Climb on.”