

**Fantasy in Selected Children's Works
By Lewis Carroll and J.K. Rowling**

PhD Dissertation
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CHAPTER ONE

Chapter I: The Background

What is Fantasy?

Children's Fantasy Literature

Fantasy in children's literature is enjoying a considerable vogue these days. With Rowling's *Harry Potter* series dominating top sellers, one cannot disregard the growing tendency of children's fantasy literature. As Plotz says, “to write about childhood, to reconstitute the self as a child, to live one's adult life as if one actually were a child became for many writers a life long vocation as well as a refuge” (front flap). Since early times, adults have used children's literature as a means of transmitting certain ideologies. This chapter aims at presenting a concise background of children's fantasy literature.

Fantasy is hard to define, and throughout history has raised much debate. Many critics and writers have defined it in terms of the psychologic aspect stressing its internal qualities and absolute meaning. According to Ursula Le Guin, “Fantasy is the language of the inner self” (70). She finds it the “appropriate language in which to tell stories to children – and others”(70). Literary fantasies are free from

the conventions and restraints of realistic texts and are based on free floating qualities. According to Maya Gotz, the term originates from the Greek word “phantazesthai” which means, to “appear”, to “bring to light”, or to “appear before the soul”(6). In her definition of the word, she says:

Phantasia describes the ability to uncover something and to make it visible. The verb Phantazesthai, is specifically used for the having of memories, dreams, and hallucinations. ‘Phantasia-Imagination’ is the capacity for inner appearances, and for internal sense presentation, which resemble external perceptions (6).

She also asserts that fantasy is a psychological process which allows humanity to construct new thoughts and notions in their minds by building on existing ones. In this respect, Rosemary Jackson suggests that fantasy expresses a yearning for an “absolute meaning”, for something unlike the “limited known world” (158).

Fantasy, however, establishes and develops an impossibility, but under the control of rhetoric and logic. In this connection, Donald Marshal says,

The fantasist chooses which principle he will violate ... The violation must be susceptible of development into a fiction, the principle violated must have some claim to importance, and the fiction must center on human involvement (82).

Jeff Gardiner also moves in the same direction asserting that fantasy transcends familiarity and identity. It thus opens the door into otherness and acknowledges unconsciousness (3).

Likewise, a differentiation between fantasy and imagination is established. Apter points out that fantasy is “unconscious, uncontrolled, highly personal and its products lack integration or generality or balance” (4), in contrast to imagination which he considers to be “reality-testing”(4). Although both acknowledge the psychologic aspect of fantasy and its relation to the unconsciousness, Maya Gotz assumes that fantasy is an outcome of the memory. She means that it is “a free rearrangement of recollected or newly produced inner images of a vivid visual nature”(6). Therefore, Gotz assumes that fantasy is the same as imagination, and therefore suggests that it is “based on the real world and uses it as a starting point from which to wonder”(6).

Hence fantasy can be related to psychoanalysis. According to the *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, fantasy has two meanings in contemporary theory and criticism. The first meaning describes generally any work of art that is delineated in an

imaginary world, uses the supernatural, or expresses expectations about what can and cannot happen. The second meaning which is more technical, derives from psychoanalysis. Fantasy here is synonymous with 'day dream', i.e. "a meditation in which consciousness gives 'free' rein to imagination ... (conscious fantasies always express unconscious wishes in a disguised or distorted manner)."

A similarity between these two uses of the word can be traced back to Freud in his 1908 essay, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming". According to the *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, in psychoanalysis, fantasy is "used for both conscious fantasies, like day dreams, and unconscious fantasies expressing repressed desires that analysis attempts to uncover". The distinction between fantasy and reality is not important in Freud's view, although according to Gotz, it is important for "psychotherapy practices that follow Freudian theory, as fantasy-play was used as a form of reducing internal drives such as aggression in children, as well as in the development of the theory of catharsis" (7). Freud asserts that the driving forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes. In this respect, Rosemary Jackson suggests that modern fantasy is a powerful myth of endlessly unsatisfied desire" (159). Some critics prefer the term "phantasies" for the unconscious.

Fantasy in this respect, is a medium for an unconscious discourse which leads to problems with regard to language and choice of words. Rosemary Jackson elaborates that the formal and thematic aspects of fantastic literature relate to such an attempt of finding “a language for desire”(62). In tackling this idea, Ursula Le Guin refers to Jung, stating that

the great fantasies, myths, and tales are indeed like dream: they speak *from* the unconscious *to* the unconscious in the *language* of the unconscious – symbol and archetype. ... they work the way music does ... they cannot be translated fully into the language of reason ... they are profoundly meaningful, and usable – practical in terms of ethics; of insight; of growth (62).

Jung considers the psyche full of fascinating figures that represent certain archetypes, one of which is the shadow: Le Guin explains that

the shadow is on the other side of our psyche, the dark brother of the conscious mind. It is Cain, Caliban, Frankenstein’s monster, Mr. Hyde. It is Virgil who guided Dante through Hell, ... it is the ... werewolf; it is the serpent, Lucifer. The shadow stands on the threshold between the conscious and the unconscious mind, and we meet it in our dreams, as sister, brother, friend, beast, monster, enemy, guide. It is all we don’t want to, can’t, admit into our conscious self, all the qualities and tendencies within us which have been repressed, denied, or not used (63-64).

Le Guin adds that this shadow is a guide: “the guide of the journey to self knowledge, to adulthood, to the light” (65). She then points to the paradox that the meaning of the name Lucifer is one who carries light. She explains that most of the fantasies are about this journey, its dangers and its rewards. Speaking of that journey, she does not support the notion that the events of the journey into the conscious be delineated in the language of daily life. She suggests that the only language that suits them is the symbolic language of the deeper psyche. However, this journey is not only psychic but also moral since in a fairy tale there is no right or wrong, but only what is appropriate.

Since the nineteenth century, fantasy has revolved around dualism, revealing an internalization of the *other*. The demonic, like Jung’s shadow is not supernatural, but is a facet of personal and interpersonal life, a presentation of unconscious desire. Accordingly, fantasy depicts “the interrelations of the ‘I’ and the ‘not I’ of self and other” (Jackson 53). In the supernatural and magical mode, otherness is depicted as “otherworldly, supernatural, as being above or outside, the human” (53). Todorov, also, asserts that the fantastic is “that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (5).

Basic to modern fantasy is the uncertainty as to which world the story belongs. To assert this point of view, Todorov states that the hero always feels a contradiction between two worlds: the real and the fantastic, and is staggered by the extraordinary phenomena surrounding him. He asserts that the fantastic describes ordinary persons “inhabiting the real world, suddenly confronted by the inexplicable” (26).

This inexplicable is characterized by emptiness, nothingness, absences and shadows. Todorov identifies two distinct types of fantasy: “the Marvelous”, in which magic and the supernatural are accepted, and the “uncanny” in which the supernatural is rationalized. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*,

The uncanny is an effect produced by stories in which the incredible events can be explained as the products of the narrator’s or protagonist’s dream, hallucination or delusion ... In tales of the marvelous, on the other hand, no such psychological explanation is offered and strange events are taken to be truly supernatural.

Todorov discards fantasy as an autonomous genre and explains that the fantastic “leads a life full of dangers, and may evaporate at any moment. It seems to be located on the frontier of two genres, the marvelous and the uncanny, rather than to be an autonomous genre”(Uncanny 17). Rosemary Jackson as well, differentiates between the marvelous and the

fantastic, asserting that different from the marvelous, secondary worlds, constitute what she calls alternative realities:

The shady worlds of the fantastic construct nothing. They are empty, emptying, dissolving. Their emptiness vitiates a fullrounded three dimensional visible world, by tracing in absences, shadows without objects. Far from fulfilling desire, these spaces perpetuate desire by insisting upon *absence*, lack, the non-seen, the unseeable (45).

She adds that since the 1800's a recurrent setting of fantasy has been the hollow world, that "which is surrounded by the real and tangible, but which is itself empty, mere absence" (46).

There are common themes in the fantastic. Todorov highlights some, of which are madness, hallucination, metamorphosis, desire, sexuality, sadism and death. But Rosemary Jackson asserts that they revolve around "making visible the unseen ... articulating the unsaid" (48). She clusters the themes of the fantastic into related areas: invisibility, transformation, dualism and good versus evil. These themes, in her view, give rise to certain motifs:

ghosts, shadows, vampires, werewolves, doubles, partial selves, reflections (mirrors), enclosures, monsters, beasts, cannibals. Transgressive impulses towards incest, necrophilia, 'abnormal' psychological states conventionally categorized as hallucination, dream, insanity, paranoia, derive from these thematic concerns, all of them concerned with erasing rigid demarcations of gender and of genre. Gender differences of male and of

female are subverted and generic distinctions between animal, vegetable and mineral are blurred in fantasy's attempt to 'turn over' 'normal' perceptions and, undermine 'realistic' ways of seeing (49).

The psychological aspect of fantasy has been an integral part of fantasy analysis. T. E. Apter establishes a link between fantasy and psychoanalysis by asserting that fantasy literature is based upon "unconscious beliefs and has as its aim the satisfaction of unconscious desires"(4). He stresses this idea by arguing that fantasy literature is susceptible to psycho-analytic interpretation of dreams because of its display of dream characteristics. He also bases his argument on the notion that

the fragmented perception, the mingling of trivial and gargantuan meanings, the anxious and inept quest for certainty, bear the mark of egoism, not only because their emphasis is on personal fear but also because the difficulties seem to arise from some flaw within the ego. (4)

Although fantasy can be related to psychology, yet it cannot be excluded from its social context. Donald Marshal, argues that the reader can assume from a fantasy perspective, the social norm or tradition which it violates, gaining knowledge about the fantasist's society (83). Rosemary Jackson also argues that literary fantasy is formed within, and is established upon, its social context. And despite the fact that it might struggle against the limits of this context, it

cannot be isolated from it. Hence they both contradict a claimed notion that fantasy literature transcends reality and escapes the human condition, constructing a superior alternative world.

The aim of fantasy thus is not essentially different from realism. Apter stresses the notion that fantasy should not be considered an escape from reality, but an investigation of it. It is also significant to refer to Rosemary Jackson's notion of Fantastic Realism. She asserts that many Victorian novelists who were considered realists relied in their texts on non realistic or fantastic elements. She asserts that the inclusion of the Gothic element in many Victorian novels implies that "within the main, realistic text, there exists another non-realistic one, camouflaged and concealed, but constantly present" (124). The definition of fantasy thus, is blurred as some critics distinguish between the fantasy genre and the fantastic which is a fantasy-like element in other fiction. Jackson relates this concept to Freud's notion of the unconscious. She writes:

This inner text reveals itself at those moments of tension when the work threatens to collapse under the weight of its own repression. These moments of disintegration, of incoherence ... remain as ... reminder of all that has been silenced in the name of establishing a normative bourgeois realism (124).

On the other hand, some critics relate the fantastic to allegory, while others set a demarcation line. Apter claims that a fantasy can be read as an allegory, but he argues that “the discontinuity of image and pattern essential to fantasy defies the systematic representations of allegory”(3). In this respect, Donald Marshal, who refers to Irwin, asserts that fantasy is not allegory, for “it does not seek some purely interpretive space where natural and supernatural can coexist” (82). Todorov also points to the fact that the fantastic cannot be located in conjunction with allegory or poetry, because it “resists both the conceptualizations of the first and the metaphorical structures of the second”(Jackson 41). Jung, in his article “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious”, also differentiates between allegory and symbol, suggesting that an allegory is a “paraphrase of a conscious content, whereas a symbol is the best possible expression for an unconscious content whose nature can only be guessed, because it is still unknown”(6). In this respect, Jackson rightly asserts that, when fantasy is “naturalized as allegory or symbolism, [it] loses its proper non signifying nature. Part of its subversive power lies in this resistance to allegory and metaphor”(41). Referring to this notion of signification, Rosemary Jackson points out that the sign/meaning relationship in fantasy is “hallowed out”(40). To support her idea, she refers to Sartre, who defines the modern fantastic as