Chapter – II

FANTASY: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Fantasy is a genre of fiction that commonly uses magic and other supernatural phenomena as a primary plot element, theme, or setting. Many works within the genre take place in imaginary worlds where magic is common. Fantasy is generally distinguished from the genre of science fiction by the expectation that it steers clear of scientific themes, though there is a great deal of overlap between the two, both of which are subgenres of speculative fiction.

In popular culture, the fantasy genre is predominantly of the medievalist form, especially since the worldwide success of *The Lord of the Rings* and related books by J. R. R. Tolkien. Fantasy has also included wizards, sorcerers, witchcraft, etc., in events which avoid horror. In its broadest sense, however, fantasy comprises works by many writers, artists, filmmakers and musicians, from ancient myths and legends to many recent works embraced by a wide audience today.

Fantasy is a vibrant area of academic study in a number of disciplines (English, cultural studies, comparative literature, history, medieval studies). Work in this area ranges widely, from the structuralism theory of Tzvetan Todorov, which emphasizes the fantastic as a luminal space, to work on the connections (political, historical, literary) between medievalism and popular culture (Jane Tolmie 2006).

Traits of fantasy

The identifying traits of fantasy are the inclusion of fantastic elements in a self-coherent (internally consistent) setting, where inspiration from mythology and folklore remains a consistent theme (John Grant and John Clute). Within such a structure, any location of the fantastical element is possible: it may be hidden in, or leak into the apparently real world setting, it may draw the characters into a world with such

elements, or it may occur entirely in a fantasy world setting, where such elements are part of the world (Jane Langton). Essentially, fantasy follows rules of its own making, allowing magic and other fantastic devices to be used and still be internally cohesive (Diana Waggoner).

History of Fantasy

Beginning perhaps with the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the earliest written documents known to humankind, mythic and other elements that would eventually come to define fantasy and its various subgenres have been a part of some of the grandest and most celebrated works of literature. From *The Odyssey* to *Beowulf*, from the *Mahabharata* to *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*, from the *Ramayana* to the *Journey to the West*, and from the Arthurian legend and medieval romance to the epic poetry of the *Divine Comedy*, fantastical adventures featuring brave heroes and heroines and deadly monsters, have inspired many audiences. In this sense, the history of fantasy and the history of literature are inextricably intertwined.

Many works are unclear as to the belief of the authors in the marvels they contain, as in the enchanted garden from the *Decameron*.

There are many works where the boundary between fantasy and other works is not clear; the question of whether the writers believes in the possibilities of the marvels in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* makes it difficult to distinguish when fantasy, in its modern sense, first began (Brian Attebery).

Although pre-dated by John Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River* (1841), the history of modern fantasy literature is usually said to begin with George MacDonald, the Scottish author of such novels as *The Princess and the Goblin* and *Phantastes* (1858), the latter of which is widely considered to be the first fantasy novel ever written for adults. MacDonald was a major influence on both J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis.

The other major fantasy author of this era was William Morris, a popular English poet who wrote several novels in the latter part of the century, including *The Well at the World's End*.

Despite MacDonald's future influence with *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), Morris's popularity with his contemporaries, and H.G. Wells's The Wonderful Visit (1895), it wasn't until the 20th century that fantasy fiction began to reach a large audience. Lord Dunsany established the genre's popularity in both the novel and the short story form. Many popular mainstream authors also began to write fantasy at this time, including H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling and Edgar Rice Burroughs. These authors, along with Abraham Merritt, established what was known as the "lost world" sub-genre, which was the most popular form of fantasy in the early decades of the 20th century, although several classic children's fantasies, such as *Peter Pan* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, were also published around this time.

Indeed, juvenile fantasy was considered more acceptable than fantasy intended for adults, with the effect that writers who wish to write fantasy had to fit their work in a work for children (C. S. Lewis). Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote fantasy in *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*, intended for children (Brian Attebery), though works for adults only verged on fantasy. For many years, this and successes such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), created the circular effect that all fantasy works, even the later *The Lord of the Rings*, were therefore classified as children's literature.

In 1923, the first all-fantasy fiction magazine, *Weird Tales*, was created. Many other similar magazines eventually followed, most noticeably *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. The pulp magazine format was at the height of its popularity at this time and was instrumental in bringing fantasy fiction to a wide audience in both the

U.S. and Britain. Such magazines were also instrumental in the rise of science fiction, and it was at this time the two genres began to be associated with each other.

By 1950th, "sword and sorcery" fiction had begun to find a wide audience, with the success of Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* and Fritz Leiber's *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser stories* (L. Sprague de Camp). However, it was the advent of high fantasy, and most of all J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* which reached new heights of popularity in the late 1960s, that allowed fantasy to truly enter the mainstream (Jane Yolen). Several other series, such as C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea books*, helped cement the genre's popularity.

The popularity of the fantasy genre has continued to increase in the 21st century, as evidenced by the best-selling statuses of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter series*; Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympian spentalogy*, which focus on Greek mythology; *The Kane Chronicles trilogy*, which focuses on Egyptian mythology; and the *Heroes of Olympus trilogy*, which focuses on Greek and Roman mythology, along with all three's successors. Several fantasy film adaptations have achieved blockbuster status, most notably *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy directed by Peter Jackson, and the *Harry Potter* films, currently one of the highest-grossing film series in film history.

Fantasy and Media

Fantasy is a popular genre, having found a home for itself in almost every medium. While fantasy art and recently fantasy films have been increasingly popular, it is fantasy literature which has always been the genre's primary medium.

Fantasy role-playing games cross several different media. *Dungeons & Dragons* was the first tabletop role-playing game, and remains the most successful and influential (*Adventure Game Industry Market Research Summary (RPGs)* 2007, "State of the Industry 2005: Another Such Victory Will Destroy Us" 2007). The science

fantasy role-playing game series *Final Fantasy* has been an icon of the role-playing video game genre (as of 2012 still among the top ten best-selling video game franchises). The first collectible card game, *Magic: The Gathering*, has a fantasy theme, and is similarly dominant in the industry ("Magic' Doubled Since 2008". 2011).

Subculture of Fantasy

Professionals such as publishers, editors, authors, artists, and scholars within the fantasy genre get together yearly at the World Fantasy Convention. The World Fantasy Awards are presented at the convention. The first WFC was held in 1975, and it has occurred every year since. The convention is held at a different city each year.

Additionally, many science fiction conventions, such as Florida's FX Show and MegaCon, cater to fantasy and horror fans. Anime conventions, such as Ohayocon or Anime Expo frequently feature showings of fantasy, science fantasy, and dark fantasy series and films, such as *Majutsushi Orphen* (fantasy), *Sailor Moon* (urban fantasy), *Berserk* (dark fantasy), and *Spirited Away* (fantasy). Many science fiction/fantasy and anime conventions also strongly feature or cater to one or more of the several subcultures within the main subcultures, including the cosplay subculture (in which people make and/or wear costumes based on existing or self-created characters, sometimes also acting out skits or plays as well), the fan fiction subculture, and the fan video or AMV subculture, as well as the large internet subculture devoted to reading and writing prose fiction are related to those genres.

Types of Fantasy

1. Utopian fantasy

The utopia and the dystopia are genres of literature that explore social and political structures. Utopian fiction is the creation of an ideal society, or utopia, as the setting for a novel. Dystopian fiction (sometimes referred as apocalyptic literature) is

the opposite: creation of an utterly horrible or degraded society that is generally headed to an irreversible oblivion, or dystopia. Many novels combine both, often as a metaphor for the different directions humanity can take in its choices, ending up with one of two possible futures. Both utopias and dystopias are commonly found in science fiction and other speculative fiction genres, and arguably are by definition a type of speculative fiction.

More than 400 utopian works were published prior to the year 1900 in the English language alone, with more than a thousand others during the twentieth century.

The word *utopia* was first used in direct context by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 work *Utopia*. The word *utopia* resembles both the Greek words "no place", "outopos", and "good place", "eutopos". In his book, which was written in Latin, More sets out a vision of an ideal society, as the title suggests, the work presents an ambiguous and ironic projection of the ideal state. The whimsical nature of the text can be confirmed by the narrator of Utopia's second book, Raphael Hythloday. The Greek root of Hythloday suggests an 'expert in nonsense'. An earlier example of a Utopian work from classical antiquity is Plato's *The Republic*, in which he outlines what he sees as the ideal society and its political system. Later examples can be seen in Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, which uses an anagram of "nowhere" as its title. This, like much of the utopian literature, can be seen as utopian satire which is most notable in the inversion of illness and crime which Butler portrays, with punishment for the former and treatment for the latter.

2. Dystopian fantasy

Dystopia is defined as a society characterized by a focus on mass poverty, squalor, suffering, or oppression that society has most often brought upon it. Most

authors of dystopian fiction explore at least one reason why things are that way, often as an analogy for similar issues in the real world. In the words of Keith M. Booker, dystopian literature is used to "provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable".

3. Ectopian fantasy

A subgenre, where the author posits either a utopian or dystopian world revolving around environmental conservation or destruction is Estonian fantasy. Danny Bloom coined the term "Estonian fantasy" in 2006, with a Twitter boost from Margaret Atwood in 2011, to cover climate change-related fiction, but the theme has existed for decades. Novels dealing with overpopulation, such as Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* (Made into movie *Soylent Green*), were popular in the 1970s, reflecting the popular concern with the effects of overpopulation on the environment. The novel *Nature's End* by Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka (1986) posits a future in which overpopulation, pollution, climate change, and resulting super storms, have led to a popular mass-suicide political movement. Some other examples of ecological dystopias are Wall-E, Robocop and Avatar's depiction of Earth.

4. Epic Fantasy

Epic fantasy is the most popular type of fantasy today, usually associated with high Fantasy. Epic fantasy usually includes a life or death struggle between good and evil, a large cast of characters, and multiple books. Most modern fantasy books are considered epic fantasy. Some of the more recent popular epic fantasy books include Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*, Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, and Brandon Sanderson's *Mist born*. Epic fantasy has been around for decades in the form of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

5. Heroic Fantasy

Heroic fantasy is a sub-genre of fantasy which chronicles the tales of heroes in imaginary lands. It always focuses on the development of a hero and usually involves a quest of some sort. Strong elements of good and evil often present in Heroic Fantasy.

The exploits of mighty, sword-wielding heroes and their wizardly and/or priestly companions, as they spend their days smiting evil, fighting monsters, recovering treasures.

6. Sword and Sorcery Fantasy

It is a genre that includes plenty of hand to hand action. The sorcery (black magic) aspect usually centers on the antagonist or villain character. Robert Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* and Fritz Lieber's *Lankhmar Book: Swords and Deviltry* are classic example of sword and sorcery. This genre is in a state of flux as new modern text on the classic sword and sorcery are being penned. This modern version includes heavy uses of magic and sword play but with a gritty, dark undertone.

7. High Fantasy

High fantasy (also referred to as epic fantasy is a sub-genre of fantasy fiction, defined either by its setting in an imaginary world or by the epic stature of its characters, themes and plot. High fantasy is a broad classification for fantasy. Quintessential works of high fantasy, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, *The Wheel of Time*, have both of these attributes. High fantasy exists on one side of a spectrum, opposite urban fantasy, which is set in the 'real' world. Some works, such as *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*, *The Never-ending Story* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* concern characters that travel between realistic and imaginary settings, and are thus difficult to classify on this spectrum.

8. Low Fantasy

It is the fantasy where traditional elements are not present (or emphasized). The fantasy world might not have magic (or if magic exists, it's not important in the context of the story) and the focus tends to be on the characters and/or plot rather than the fantastical elements. Low fantasy is fairly active fantasy genre these days. It is a subgenre of fantasy fiction involving "non-rational happenings that are without causality or rationality because they occur in the rational world where such things are not supposed to occur." Low fantasy stories are set either in the real world or a fictional but rational world, and are contrasted with high fantasy stories which take place in a completely fictional fantasy world setting with its own set of rules and physical laws.

9. Dark Fantasy

The dark fantasy is a subgenre that combines elements of fantasy with horror. Dark fantasy is often used to refer to horror fantasy and include stories about demonic creatures, mummies, vampires, and others. Example-Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. One of the best dark fantasy series is C.S. Friedman's *Cold fire Trilogy*.

10. Mythic Fantasy

A fantasy where traditional mythological elements are woven into the story is called as Mythic fantasy. Neil Gaiman (as in American Gods) is an author who includes elements of Myth in his fiction. Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* fits this as well.

Mythic fiction overlaps with urban fantasy and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but mythic fiction also includes contemporary works in non-urban settings. Mythic fiction refers to works of contemporary literature that often cross the divide between literary and fantasy fiction.

Though mythic fiction can be loosely based in mythology, it frequently uses familiar mythological personages' archetypes such as tricksters, or the thundered. This

is in contrast to other forms of fantasy, such as the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, which invent their own legends and folklore or volunteer entirely new pantheons.

11. Fables / Fairy Tales

A fairy tale is a type of short story that typically features European folkloric fantasy characters, such as fairies, goblins, elves, trolls, dwarves, giants, mermaids, or gnomes, and usually magic or enchantments. Fairy tales may be distinguished from other folk narratives such as legends (which generally involve belief in the veracity of the events described) and explicitly moral tales, including beast fables. Unlike Mythic Exploration Fantasy, Fables tend to focus on imparting some sort of moral wisdom to the protagonist the end of the tale. A Fable is often approached from the perspective of a child or youth. Currently, some writers are modernizing fables for the modern adult reader.

12. Romantic Fantasy

It is a blend between the romance and fantasy genres. The focus of romantic fantasy is the romantic interactions between characters. Romantic fantasy is a subgenre of fantasy fiction, describing a fantasy story using many of the elements and conventions of the romance genre. One of the key features of romantic fantasy involves the focus on social, political, and romantic relationships. Romantic fantasy has been published by both fantasy lines and romance lines.

Magic in romantic fantasy

"Attitudes toward magic in Romantic Fantasy are usually very different from that expressed in most high fantasy or sword and sorcery. Rather than representing an alien and corrupting force that destroys its practitioners, or a complex, secretive body of folklore that isolates magicians from normal society via long study and seclusion, magic typically takes the form of innate abilities that are natural and simple to use,

sometimes described as psychic talents like empathy or precognition, sometimes oriented towards affinity for or control of a particular natural element (such as the four classical Greek elements, fire, air, earth and water). Magic is thus presented in the narrative as an innate and positive part of someone's nature, and by extension a "natural" part of the world; fear of these abilities is often depicted as a reaction born of ignorance, poor guidance, or evil."

13. Urban Fantasy

Urban Fantasy is often called Contemporary Fantasy. The setting is contemporary, often taking place in urban settings. Often the magical world hides behind the normal world -- i.e. there is a hidden fantasy world that most people don't know about. Urban fantasy is a sub-genre of fantasy defined by place; the fantastic narrative has an urban setting. Urban fantasy exists on one side of a spectrum, opposite high fantasy, which is set in an entirely fictitious world. Many urban fantasies are set in contemporary times and contain supernatural elements. However, the stories can take place in historical, modern, or futuristic periods, and the settings may include fictional elements. The prerequisite is that they must be primarily set in a city

14. Paranormal Fantasy

Paranormal romance is a literary subgenre of the romance novel. Paranormal romance focuses on romance and included elements beyond the range of scientific explanation, blending together themes from the genres of traditional fantasy, science fiction or horror. Common hallmarks are romantic relationships between humans and vampires, shape shifters, or fantastical beings. Novels of the genre include the *Dark Guardian series* by Rachel Hawthorne, *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer, *Enchantment* by Charlotte Abel, *The Forever Girl* by Rebecca Hamilton, and *Dark Lover* by JR Ward.

Beyond the more prevalent themes involving vampires, shape shifters, ghosts, or time travel, paranormal romances can also include books featuring characters with psychic abilities, like telekinesis or telepathy.

15. New Weird / Slipstream

Fantasy that's completely different from what one considers normal fantasy. Landscapes and peoples present in the novel often bizarre; language is often highly stylized or poetic. Slipstream is a kind of fantastic or non-realistic fiction that crosses conventional genre boundaries between science fiction, fantasy, and mainstream literary fiction.

The term slipstream was coined by cyberpunk author Bruce Sterling in an article originally published in July 1989. Slipstream fiction has consequently been described as "the fiction of strangeness," which is as clear a definition as any of the others in wide use. Science fiction authors James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel, editors of Feeling Very Strange: The Slipstream Anthology, argue that cognitive dissonance is at the heart of slipstream, and that it is not so much a genre as a literary effect, like horror or comedy.

Slipstream falls between speculative fiction and mainstream fiction. While some slipstream novels employ elements of science fiction or fantasy, not all do. The common unifying factor of these pieces of literature is some degree of the surreal, the not-entirely-real, or the markedly anti-real. In 2007, the first London Literature Festival at the Royal Festival Hall held a Slipstream night chaired by Toby Litt and featuring the British authors Steven Hall and Scarlett Thomas.

16. Magic Realism

Magic realism is a type of fantasy where magic is accepted as part of the system. Magic itself has consequences and may involve the use of some prop or tool to utilize

(spell, amulet, potion, incantation). The main quality of Magic Realism is that magic must follow a set of established rules. There are often negative effects resulting from the use of magic, overuse of magic, or negative use of magic. Gritty Fantasy /Realistic Fantasy often incorporate Magic Realism as do some High Fantasy tales.

One example of magic realism occurs when a character in the story continues to be alive beyond the normal length of life and this is subtly depicted by the character being present throughout many generations. On the surface the story has no clear magical attributes and everything is conveyed in a real setting, but such a character breaks the rules of our real world. The author may give precise details of the real world such as the date of birth of a reference character and the army recruitment age, but such facts help to define an age for the fantastic character of the story that would turn out to be an abnormal occurrence like someone living for two hundred years.

17. Science Fantasy

Science fantasy, more commonly known as science fiction-fantasy, is a mixed genre within the umbrella of speculative fiction which draws upon tropes and elements from both science fiction and fantasy, and sometimes also incorporates elements of horror. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* points out that as a genre, science fantasy "has never been clearly defined," and was most commonly used in the period 1950-1966. Often, Science Fantasies take place far into the future where advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. The landscapes may be completely unidentifiable from our own. Quite often, Science Fantasy is combined with the New Weird to create bizarre landscapes and settings.

Science fantasy versus science fiction

Distinguishing between science fiction and fantasy, Rod Sterling claimed that the former was "the improbable made possible" while the latter was "the impossible

made probable". As a combination of the two, science fantasy gives a scientific veneer of realism to things that simply could not happen in the real world under any circumstances - where science fiction does not permit the existence of fantasy or supernatural elements; science fantasy explicitly relies upon them.

18. Alternate History

Fiction set in a world where the world's history has been altered from our own. What sets this apart from merely fantasy is that the history/locations/characters may resemble those present in the real world, though changed.

Alternate history or alternative reality is a genre of fiction consisting of stories that are set in worlds in which one or more historical events unfold differently than it did in the real world. It can be variously seen as a sub-genre of literary fiction, science fiction, and historical fiction; different alternate history works may use tropes from any or all of these genres. It is sometimes abbreviated AH. Another occasionally used term for the genre is "allohistory" (literally "other history").

19. Historical Fantasy

Involves the retelling of actual events in human history, with a healthy dose of the fantastical or magical thrown in to boot. For example, one could be fighting naval battles with talking dragons instead of ships (as in His Majesty's Dragon) or a great historical leader from the past might be capable of using magic.

Historical fantasy is a sub-genre of historical fiction that incorporates fantastic elements (such as magic) into the narrative. It is used as an umbrella term for the sword and sorcery genre and sometimes, if fantasy is involved, the sword-and-sandal genre too. Stories fitting this classification generally take place prior to the 20th century. Films of this genre may have plots set in biblical or classical antiquity, often with plots

based very loosely on mythology or legends of Greco-Roman history, or the surrounding cultures of the same era.

20. Steam punk Fantasy

Steam punk is a sub-genre of science fiction that typically features steam-powered machinery, especially in a setting inspired by industrialized Western civilization during the 19th century. Steam punk works are often set in an alternative history of the 19th century's British Victorian era or American "Wild West", in a post-apocalyptic future during which steam power has regained mainstream use, or in a fantasy world that similarly employs steam power. Steam punk perhaps most recognizably features anachronistic technologies or retro-futuristic inventions as people in the 19th century might have envisioned them, and is likewise rooted in the era's perspective on fashion, culture, architectural style, and art.

21. Superhero Fantasy

Superhero fiction is a genre originating in and most common to American comic books, though it has expanded into other media through adaptations and original works.

The form is a type of speculative fiction examining the adventures of costumed crime fighters known as superheroes, who often possess superhuman powers and battle similarly powered criminals known as super villains. Occasionally, this type of fiction is referred to as superhuman or super-powered fiction rather than superhero fiction in order to reflect that broader scope of both heroes and villains, as well as cover those characters with enhanced abilities that fall outside the classic superhero/super villain dichotomy.

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