
Stephens, John (1992a) Language and Ideology in Children’s Fiction, London: Longman. Scattered throughout this study are insights into and examples of the way realism works linguistically: as a metonymic mode, in the construction of character, as a vehicle for ideology and in conversation.


Kenny Watson, in The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963 (Curtis, 1995), has been warned not to go swimming at Collier’s Landing because of a dangerous whirlpool. His grandmother pronounces it ‘Wool Pooh’ in her accented Alabaman English, and Kenny’s usually fearless older brother, Byron, tells him that the Wool Pooh is Winnie’s evil twin, eager to suck him under and drown him. Kenny is not about to let a silly fantasy explanation like that stop him from having a cool swim on a hot day, and he enters the seemingly tranquil water only to be grabbed by the Wool Pooh, whose grey fingers he sees and feels clutching his feet and dragging him to his death. He is rescued, but that isn’t his last encounter with the Wool Pooh; the second time the monster shows up is at the site of the Birmingham church bombing, moving in and out of the smoke-filled confusion where four teenage girls were killed in a stunning hate crime.

In his perceptive portrayal of a young boy’s first encounters with random and violent death, Christopher Paul Curtis personifies Kenny’s nemesis as a terrifying monster, a creature of nightmares in an otherwise realistic novel about a family’s visit to the American South during the turbulent time of the Civil Rights Movement. Kenny’s fantastic encounter with the Wool Pooh is predicated on three things: first, the unexpected sensation of being physically acted on and controlled by a powerful but unseen force; second, the use of unfamiliar language to describe a mysterious phenomenon; and third, an intertextual reference to a fantasy story with which he is familiar, but which is twisted in a perverse, uncanny way to indicate a dark and repressed underside. These three elements form a definitional matrix for understanding the ways in which fantasy becomes operative for children both in their psychological development and in their literary experience: fantasy begins as a way of understanding and providing signifiers for a child’s experience of his and other bodies in the world and provides countless metaphors for the vicissitudes of embodiment; fantasy depends for its existence on the innovative use of language to create, develop and sustain worlds, including developing psychic worlds that may or may not have referential ties to actual phenomena; and lastly, fantasy participates in an intertextual web of cross-reference, allusion and literary history for its themes, motifs and structures.

As an ordinary human activity, fantasizing or creating fantasies plays a crucial role in establishing the life-world of a subject; using Martin Heidegger’s terminology, we could say that children are thrown into a world that they did not
them set the elements of their environment into an order over which they exercise some control.

In this project, they often imitate the way they themselves are controlled by the various elements—parents, siblings, caregivers, domestic spaces—in their environment, but they also draw on mythic characters, architecture and landscapes from the stories they are told, indicating a relatively sophisticated understanding of the way language can create meaningful worlds that do not reflect the world in which they live. Language begins to become untethered from a fixed one-to-one correspondence of word to object and to develop the abstract and substitutionary character of metaphoric thinking. These stories and fantasy play also take on a defensive character, in the psychoanalytic sense of displacing, condensing or projecting the child's anxieties onto safer targets. Thus, an angry child takes out his aggression on a doll rather than a human sibling, and a fearful one develops her own mythologies surrounding events that are threatening, such as a mother's pregnancy, or a thunderstorm. Like the mythmakers of ancient cultures, children very quickly become accustomed to inventing stories to explain unfamiliar phenomena, finding or fantasizing concrete foci for diffuse emotional states such as love, fear, anger and anxiety. Thus, fantasy becomes functional for children attempting to construct a world that is manageable: small enough for them to acquire a sense of mastery and empowerment and thus mitigate or at least contain their fears and anxieties, yet large enough to facilitate wonder and help them imagine possibilities for things to be other than how they find them.

As a literary mode taken up by writers specifically addressing children and young adults, then, fantasy meets readers on paradoxically familiar ground. Fantasy writers construct worlds in ways homologous to those that children have used to construct their own worlds: they invent family relationships and domestic and outdoor spaces; names for people, places and concepts; and fill in gaps in understanding with storied memories, myths of origin, time shifts and imaginary dangers that insert themselves between the child and what he is not yet ready to encounter or understand. If writers want their fictional worlds to work differently from the world that surrounds them, they invent new words or realign old ones for their concepts—the explanation Mrs Who and Mrs Whatsit offer for ‘tessering’ as a mode of travel that functions like a wrinkle in the fabric of time being a prime example (Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*, 1962). While there are any number of ways in which these worlds might be configured, the ones that seem to hold the most fascination for young world-makers are the bounded ones, the ones J. R. R. Tolkien called Secondary Worlds. This sense of a border is important for children attempting to create a sustainable life-world because part of the anxiety created by living day to day is that one has been set adrift in an infinite universe. For the very young child, as well as for people of any age going through stressful experiences, such as job loss, a change in status or moving from home, this sort of freedom can cause fear rather than exhilaration: the uncertainty of outcomes, the feeling of being without an anchor or guarantee, the anxiety of being in process are all part of the condition of being.
thrown into the world and having to construct and protect a self from as yet indeterminate dangers. Rosemary Jackson (1981) notes that one of the characteristics of the type of fantasy called the marvellous is that the narrative voice ‘has complete knowledge of completed events’, thus allaying the anxiety of indeterminacy and reinforcing the fantasy of a unified, bounded world. Hence, the created secondary worlds of Middle Earth, Narnia, Neverland, Hogwarts and the Inkworld are filled with compensatory wonders that fill up or cover over the sense of being alone in a world, but, with the exception of Cornelia Funke’s Inkworld, they also offer the comforting sense of being in a world where a firm but non-intrusive narrative voice has complete imaginative control. Interestingly, Fenoglio’s experience in the *metafictive* Inkworld, where the narrative regularly slips from his control and goes off in unexpected directions, is in fact more analogous to the level of power children actually have over the worlds they construct.

Literary critics and psychoanalytic thinkers address this creative, world-making process in different ways. For Tolkien (1964, p. 50), for instance, ‘Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker’. David Gooderham (1995) links the need to construct and consume fantasies to Erikson’s theory of growth crises, showing how different kinds of fantasy respond to different stages of development. Sigmund Freud attributes this kind of creative activity largely to a reaction against the unbearable weight of the reality principle. For Freud, staged measures of development are operative in both individuals and societies; fantasy emerges out of the residue of the infant’s belief in her own omnipotence and out of a pre-scientific worldview that sought responses from the gods to prayers, solicitations and sacrifices. As a scientific worldview has displaced a more animistic one, and as an infant realizes the limits of her own power in manipulating her world, human beings must come to terms with the fact that they are not the creator or centre of their own worlds but instead are part of a (signifying) system over which they have little control. Thus, the fantasies produced through the residue of animistic thinking emerge as ‘creations with the help of which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development, strives to fend off the manifest prohibitions of reality’ (Freud, 1955, p. 240).

It is important to remember that Freud was utterly in thrall to a scientific worldview, so that ‘manifest prohibitions of reality’ were a distinct challenge for him as he studied the more irrational aspects of desire, belief and human pathology. Critics such as Maria Nikolajeva (2006) and C. W. Sullivan III (1996) point to the growing dominance of the scientific worldview as the condition under which fantasy became a popular mode of literary expression. The increased emphasis on rationality and empiricism during the European Enlightenment denigrated imagination and emotion as ways of knowing; self-appointed guardians of children’s literature, such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Sarah Trimmer, Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth, followed the Lockean injunction to keep children away from fantastic tales of supernatural creatures in order to ensure that their growth in rational judgement would be unperturbed by irrational fears of and wishes for things that didn’t exist under a rationalist or empiricist paradigm. They created a literature for children that emphasized the canny, that is, the homelike and familiar. As Dale Townshend (2008) points out, however, at the same time in literary history, the *Gothic* was becoming an enormously popular mode for adult readers. Clearly, what is repressed or ignored does not simply go away; in this case, the increased emphasis on the canny produced a fascination with its opposite—the uncanny—as evidenced by the persistent interest in the more fantastic chapbook stories and the enormous growth in fantasy literature for children beginning with the work of the Grimms, E. T. A. Hoffmann and Hans Christian Andersen.

While the uncanny can summon quite disturbing emotions of estrangement and dis-ease in fantasy literature for adults, the most common form the uncanny takes in children’s fantasy has to do with inanimate objects showing signs of life, power and volition. One way of understanding this distinction comes through looking at the needs of the body and the developing ego. The human body is vulnerable, hence its fight-or-flight mechanism. Throughout human history, stories have encoded fear and rescue in both natural and supernatural narratives, giving listeners and readers images on which to project and practise their responses to fear, as well as develop the belief that they can survive, conquer or be delivered from whatever threatens them. While Locke and his followers were eager to dismiss the supernatural images as superstition, they could not eradicate the tendency for people to cultivate imaginary creatures and scenarios as the screens on which to project their fears and desires. Nor could they erase the tendency to invest everyday objects with animate properties, either as a help in times of threat or as the source of the threat itself. Things of power—the sword Excalibur, cornucopias, magic cauldrons, Mrs Who’s glasses, Harry Potter’s wand—link to bodies via their properties as phallic and yonic symbols and in their ability to enhance ordinary physical abilities; they also, as Freud suggested, show the uncanny effect of projecting our unconscious desires onto our environment. Such animistic thinking, while dominant in childhood, never really goes away, as anyone who has ever talked to a computer or car can attest. But it also indicates an internal struggle whereby id-generated desires emerge in conflict with limiting realities. Fantasized satisfaction of appetites, the ability to act on our aggression, the desire to transgress our body’s limits—these represent powerful wishes; objects empowered to do our bidding without wills of their own become repositories of wish-fulfilment fantasies. On the other hand, however, the reality-attuned ego knows that animate objects, like the id-wishes that control them, have the power to be quite frightening and the internalized *superegoic* constraints already operative by the time the child can imagine these scenarios can impose sanctions of their own to render them objects of dread. Countless stories exist to dissuade children from such fantasies, many taking the form of ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice’ as visualized in Disney’s *Fantasia* (1940), where the novice summons power beyond his ability to control.
But there is more than a desire for personal omnipotence at work in the emergence of fantasy as a prevalent literary mode: a scientific worldview cannot fully account for anomalous events or the irrationality of desire or satisfactorily explain the differences between concepts we can only imagine (such as infinity or a sense of the numinous) and phenomena we can experience and measure (from grazed knees to land speed records). In other words, much lived human experience must be repressed in the service of a scientific worldview. That repressed material finds its way into stories in its various aspects as horror, wish fulfillment or a residual desire for a responsive universe. Fairy tales, for instance, which are the wellspring of modern fantasy, often take as their subject a sense of universal responsiveness: personal kindness or goodness results in a supernatural gift of prosperity, whereas greed or callousness results in punishment. In shaping morality as a call and response from an intelligent universe that actually pays attention to human action, folk stories reassert and perpetuate animistic thinking. Magic realism, with its intrusion of the fantastic into real-world scenarios, presents an eloquent argument for the reinvigoration of animistic thinking in a world disenchanted by scientific explanations. Each of David Almond’s books, for instance, stages an encounter between scientific, technological or simply ordinary realism and a numinous creature; in each case, the creature needs the faith of the protagonists in something beyond what a rationalist, empiricist worldview can provide in order to survive. Kenny Watson’s Wool Pooh and Margaret Mahy’s ghost stories offer examples of the negative potential of magic realism: aspects of diabolical evil may intrude into a rational world as well as aspects of miraculous wonder.

Despite these calls to reinvigorate an animistic worldview, or at least accommodate it alongside a scientific one, the prohibitions of reality impinge upon the child in multiple ways, the most consistent of which may be upon the body. It grows without our permission, stops growing without our permission and is only partially responsive to non-surgical attempts to change its structure. It can’t fly. It is always visible. Flagship fantasies such as those by Lewis Carroll, J. M. Barrie and J. K. Rowling derive much of their fascination from explorations of what might happen if these limitations of embodiment were relaxed or overthrown. Jackson (1981) points out that fantasy treats desire in specific ways: it can tell of desire by giving wishes concrete form, as does Rowling with her creation of a world where children can use magic for personal empowerment and social good; it can seek to expel desire, exposing its likely unpleasant outcomes, as with Carroll in his rather cruel manipulations of Alice’s body and her progress; or it can do both, as Barrie does in taking the children to their Neverland and back again. Tracing the body in fantasy literature leads to the identification of instances of jubilant transcendence and competence or horrific expressions of failure and teratology. In each case, embodiment plays a key role in establishing lasting audience appeal: throughout the changing values and circumstances of history, the body persists as a problem of limitations to be imaginatively overcome in the telling of desire or as a warning against trying to transgress those limitations in the expelling of desire.

Whether telling or expelling, what we are really seeking, according to Slavoj Žižek, is not a staging of our own desires per se but a way of making ourselves visible and desirable for the Other and a way of confronting and overcoming the lack we find in both ourselves and the world around us. That is, as we come to terms with the fact that we are merely part of a larger system, we are confronted with the fact that the system is incomplete and flawed and that there is no guarantee of our own importance or desirability in such a system. Thus, we enter into fantasy seeking what Lacan called the objet a, ‘the secret treasure that guarantees the minimum of fantasmatistic consistency of the subject’s being . . . that “something in me more than myself” on account of which I perceive myself as worthy of the Other’s desire’ (Žižek, 1998, p. 194). Messianic children’s fantasies operate according to this principle: children are identified as saviors through prophecies or as possessing some special quality that sets them apart from the norm and makes them the only ones who can solve the mystery, pull the sword from the stone, save the world and fix its ills. In other words, these special children are themselves the solution to the problem of lack and desire in the world, and if they perform their task adequately, the world can be made new again. The lessons learned by these heroes, and the readers who identify with them, are not so much that the heroes are in fact special but that they are responsible and must act: they must be ready to take up a position of moral agency in the midst of conflict. The recent film Kung Fu Panda (2008) illustrates this quite clearly: Po, a lazy panda with an active fantasy life, is surprisingly identified as the Dragon Warrior who, according to prophecy, will save the Valley of Peace from destruction. He completes his training and takes possession of the Dragon Scroll, only to find that the secret of the Dragon Warrior’s power is that there is no secret. That is, as Lacan points out, the notion of a secret treasure within is a fantasy; there is no guarantee of desirability for the Other, and the subject must become the source of his or her own consistency and desirability in a system that may or may not recognize him or her.

Lacan calls this recognition ‘traversing the fundamental fantasy’, a process whereby a subject becomes her own cause. Children begin life as the object of someone else’s desire; they are, in effect, caused and protected by this desire. This initially imbues them with feelings of omnipotence and invulnerability, as every utterance of a beloved infant evokes a response and needs are generally met with alacrity. As a child grows, however, she begins to sense that her caregivers have desires other than for her. No longer able to command attention as a birthright, she must seek to become desirable, and when that desirability is not recognized, she compensates with fantasies of empowerment wherein her true worth is recognized or her specialness still affords some protection. At some point, however, she must traverse this fundamental fantasy and become the cause and instigator of her own desire. For instance, while Tom Riddle (aka Voldemort) is forever debilitated by the absence of maternal desire (his mother neither wanted him nor loved him, leaving him to compensate by making power his only love object), Harry is sustained throughout by the narrative Dumbledore...
gives him of a mother’s love strong enough to withstand the most lethal curse. Harry is also challenged by a legacy of extreme competence on the part of both his parents. His desire to be desired by these infinitely desirable parents is first evident when he gazes into the Mirror of Erised, but it reaches its apex in the scene where Harry has travelled back in time and mistakenly thinks that his father is casting the Patronus charm that is protecting him and Sirius from the dementors; at the last possible moment he traverses his fundamental fantasy of parental protection and casts the Patronus himself, effectively becoming his own saviour. Like Po, he has to stop looking for some outside source that will guarantee the consistency and worth of his own being and act without that guarantee.

Becoming the cause of one’s own desire doesn’t always come about in an epiphanic rush, as is the case with Harry Potter’s saving himself, or young Wart pulling the sword from the anvil. Instead, a much more common trigger is boredom, along with the feeling of being cast-off and overlooked. Neil Gaiman’s eponymous Coraline, for instance, is bored and feeling neglected by her busy parents, and this is what sends her through the doorway to the realm of the Other Mother and makes Coraline vulnerable to the Other Mother’s attentions (see Coats, 2008, for a full analysis). Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy are likewise bored, restless and overlooked before their games lead Lucy, and eventually the others, into Narnia. E. Nesbit’s ‘five children’ in Five Children and It (1902) would never have discovered ‘It’ were it not that they had been bored and casting about for something to do. Winnie first encounters the immortal Tucks in Natalie Babbit’s Tuck Everlasting (1975) when she is feeling bored, confined and misunderstood by her relatives. The children in Dr Seuss’s The Cat in the Hat (1957) are bored and abandoned, too, and then the Cat shows up to introduce anarchy and mayhem into their humdrum day. The sense of being neglected and the experience of being bored are related in terms of desire: they both emerge when the child realizes that the Other is no longer taking full charge of his desire. As caregivers turn their attention to other things, children feel abandoned, cast off. Boredom, then, signals the advent of a new phase in a child’s psychic life. According to Adam Phillips (1994, p. 69), ‘boredom starts as a regular crisis in the child’s developing capacity to be alone in the presence of the mother’. It’s a developmental achievement when the child realizes that he can, and indeed must, have desires that are his own, rather than directed and controlled by his caregivers. I would argue that boredom is also related to the limitations of the body as discussed above, as well as the limitations imposed by our position within a signifying system; in any instance where we have run up against the demands of the reality principle regarding our embodied circumstances or our position within the Symbolic, our recompense will be to turn to fantasy, to tell and expel, to imagine what might be worth desiring, to test limits by imaginatively transgressing them.

Embracing on this project of developing our own desires is a fraught enterprise, however, as we know from childhood that our desires can be dangerous. This is the premise upon which Bruno Bettelheim builds his argument for the ‘uses of enchantment’. Fairy tales, claims Bettelheim, ‘start where the child really is in his psychological and emotional well-being’ (1976, p. 6). That is, fairy tales provide metaphorical outlets for all of the rage, aggression, fear, appetites and yearnings that plague the developing child and help the child own and work through these darker impulses towards more positive social behaviour. Although Bettelheim’s methods and his simplistic views of reader response have been challenged, there is no doubt that fairy tale narratives become part of the strategy the ego uses to negotiate between the voracious id and the overbearing superego, most often in Jackson’s sense of the telling of desire. Nonsense literature, on the other hand, usually proceeds through the expelling of desire, taking a desire to its most vulgar or ridiculous extreme. For instance, Maurice Sendak playfully illustrates the id politics of desire for the mother in the counting poem ‘I One My Mother’ (Opie and Opie, 1992, pp. 74–5). A baby begins the poem at the mother’s breast, consuming more of his mother with each line until she is completely inside him by the line ‘I eight [ate] my mother’. The humour that results from the impossibility of the situation enables the child to see the absurdity of the desire itself, and thus to expel it by staging it in fantasy.

Most of these narratives, despite their seeming fondness for anarchy, ultimately result in conservative outcomes; that is to say, they feature protagonists with anti-social drives that threaten the stability of their worlds, but these protagonists then become empowered through mastering these drives, at least until next time. In this sense, the stories demonstrate the function of Bakhtinian carnival: rules, hierarchies and social propriety get upended for a time, but when control and order are ultimately restored, they function more smoothly as a result of the release of tension and negative emotions that carnival affords. Where the Wild Things Are (1963) is prototypical of this outcome. Max’s anti-social behaviour threatens his relationship with his mother, and his threat to eat her up reflects his desire for reunification with the maternal body. When he is sent to his room, he uses fantasy to manage his anger and to assert his own power, but it is only when he becomes to his inner wild things what his mother is to him that he is able to transcend his predicament and face the consequences of his loneliness without her. Given the choice of remaining wild, free and anti-social or of mastering his impulses and going home, he chooses home. The protagonist in Gaiman’s The Wolves in the Walls (2003) faces a similar situation, where her home is threatened by wolves that she has obviously conjured, like Max, through her drawings. As representations of inner tensions and anti-social tendencies, the wolves are destroying her home, and she realizes that, if she wants it to remain intact, she has to do battle with the things that threaten it. Mo Willems’s Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus (2003) offers a more participatory version of this for the child reader: instead of passively reading about a child who must master her impulses, these are manifested through a pigeon’s desire, and the child reader is put in the position of actively telling the pigeon ‘NO!’, no matter how frustrated the bird gets. The pigeon’s wheedling, cajoling and final temper tantrum will be instantly recognizable as tactics the child herself has
This use of fantasy narrative to negotiate between impulse and social propriety continues as a child's life-world becomes more complex, and her body begins to acquire its secondary sexual characteristics. Here again, the demands of the body call forth a need for fantasmatic defences. For instance, the desire for reincorporation into the maternal body (or vice versa) becomes sexualized at adolescence, as the body becomes the site of strange and frighteningly strong appetites. Connected to the archaic memories of being inside the mother and feeding off her, it is no wonder that nascent sexual appetites are shot through with guilt: love, sex, violence and consumption are hopelessly entangled in the unconscious. These desires and appetites are linked to social prohibitions as well, specifically prohibitions regarding substances that Kristeva identifies as abject, such as wayward body fluids that the child has long ago internalized in terms of disgust but are now being transformed into objects of sexual curiosity. Because the adolescent body is changing shape, sprouting hairs and emitting unfamiliar smells, and because hormonal fluctuations result in rapidly shifting moods and strong emotions, the fantasies needed to manage these changes in embodiment and sexual awareness often manifest themselves as Gothic horror. Caught between terror, romance and humour, adolescent fantasy novels play host to an array of abject monsters, giving adolescents a variety of subject positions as they identify with the creatures, or the humans, who fight with and/or love them.

Ideologically speaking, the monsters of fantasy encode our current views about what it means to be human, and how we should respond to those whom we consider other. This kind of ideological work is where Jack Zipes locates his version of the uses of enchantment; unlike Bettelheim, who sees the work of fairy tales in terms of a developing inner world, Zipes values fairy tales for helping children see and contest the often unexamined ideologies concerning such things as gender, entitlement and consumerism that are operative in their life-worlds. In terms of the recent flood of vampire literature for teens, for instance, it would be important for an ideological analysis to note that vampires are no longer the sexually rapacious, immoral demons they once were. Rather, a new breed of vampires, spawned by the likes of Joss Whedon (Buffy the Vampire Slayer), Scott Westerfeld's Uglies (2005), Annette Curtis Klause's The Silver Kiss (1990) and Stephenie Meyer's Twilight (2005) among others, have emerged, whose destiny is to use their superhuman physical powers to save humanity. These self-controlled vampires are heroes in a culture that encourages full-on consumption and immediate gratification of any real or imagined desire. That they are vampires suggests a belief in teenage voraciousness, the predatory nature of sexual desire and a certain fear of teens as a tribe. However, the fact that they consistently exercise control over their considerable powers for evil in favour of protection and self-restraint reflects the current competing cultural desire for sustainability over consumption and a strong belief that power, coupled with self-control, is a viable agent for change. The resulting stories exhibit the continuing tension in literature for young people between an acknowledgment of the demons young people have to fight and the didactic impulse to move the fight in a particular direction. Whereas vampires used to be categorically evil and power could only ever corrupt, new narratives posit the hope that evil can be redeemed and power can be used for good.

Children's fantasy scripts provide readers with much pleasure, but they also do important work. They both bring to the surface and disguise fraught emotional and developmental processes in ways that allow readers to stay emotionally engaged in these processes. They connect readers to their bodies such that young people can manage the horror of change and fragmentation while maintaining the necessary illusion of coherence and competence. They hold subjectivities together with a promise of a unified reality when present realities seem in danger of disintegrating. And they challenge those realities in ways that open new ethical possibilities, even when subjectivities, bodies and histories suggest that violence and consuming desires are the only way of being in the world. Indeed, without the dynamism of fantasy, readers would be far less able to meet and conquer their dragons, name and enact their own desires, and change their world.

FURTHER READING

Armitt, Lucie (2005) Fantasy Fiction: An Introduction, New York: Continuum. A concise and readable introduction to the major themes and issues in fantasy and its literary criticism. She resists imposing categories on fantasy, focusing instead on theory and the criticism of fantasy, historical developments and reader response. She offers close readings of classic works of fantasy from Lewis Carroll to Harry Potter and posits that utopia is the main concern of modern fantasy. A useful, annotated reading list of critical work is included.

Gooderham, David (1995) 'Children's Fantasy Literature: Toward an Anatomy', Children's Literature in Education, 26:3: 171–83. After reviewing the ways in which fantasy categorization schemes have been traditionally undertaken in criticism, Gooderham identifies five types of fantasy that correspond to the imaginal themes that connect to Erikson's stages of development. Very useful in thinking about the connections between form and reader response.

Jackson, Rosemary (1981) Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, New York: Methuen. Jackson provides a comprehensive review of critical literature on fantasy, and then turns her focus to psychoanalytic perspectives. Because her emphasis is on works that disturb the psyche and create dis-ease with the status quo, her work is more applicable to young adult fantasy than to children's fantasy, which she rather dismissively relegated to the less interesting category of the 'marvellous'.

with a summary and analysis of works by major and some minor authors of the period. More than 500 individual works are discussed.


This classic work establishes a structural grid of sorts in order to classify fantasy as a genre, and then plays primarily at the boundaries and intersections of these categorical distinctions. Like Jackson’s work, it is more useful for studying works for young adults than for children, where the hesitancies and uncertainties that Todorov enjoys pursuing between the psychological and the supernatural are more likely to be shut down with tidy explanations.


Oft-quoted source on children’s literature in general as well as fantasy in particular, this work lays out Tolkien’s perspective on writing in a mode that is often considered non-serious.

In *The Crossover Novel* (Falconer, 2009) I argued that children’s fiction underwent a meteoric rise in popularity and critical esteem among adult readers over the decade 1997–2007. J. K. Rowling’s ‘Harry Potter’ series (1997–2007) is often seen as the catalyst but, although it precipitated more widespread changes in publishing and marketing strategies, which in turn had their impact on readers’ choices of consumption, the series was itself successful partly because the social and economic conditions were ripe for such a shift in perspective on children’s literature. Thus, it should be viewed as part of a larger cultural change in contemporary Western society which accords greater weight and value to the signifier, the ‘child’, than in previous decades (whether this translates to more actual power for real children remains open to debate). In Britain, the history of children’s literature crossing to adult readers is long and well established. Although published for children, Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863), Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and George MacDonald’s *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) were recognized as ‘serious’ works by Victorian adult readers. In the twentieth century, the global popularity of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5) and Richard Adams’s *Watership Down* (1972), not to mention the ‘Star Wars’ films, gives evidence of ‘crossover phenomena’ existing avant la lettre. But we now have la lettre; in other words, the publishing industry, and readers in general, recognize the crossover phenomenon to the degree that it can now be named and acknowledged as legitimate.

Here I wish to focus on the rise to prominence of young adult (YA) fiction among adult readers. For if there have been changes over the millennial decade in the way adult readers engage with children’s literature in general, the changes in adults’ engagement with YA fiction are, perhaps, even more distinctive and significant. It is important to realize that such changes, like those occurring to children’s literature in general, form part of a continuity of historical development and are not simply the result of recent marketing campaigns. In the longer historical view, young adult fiction emerged as a distinct category in the mid-twentieth century, with works such as George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). By pointing out some of the distinct characteristics of millennial YA fiction, I do not wish to lessen the impact of these now classic novels; on the contrary, I would argue that