BEYOND DEMONS AND DARKNESS: A GENEALOGY OF EVIL IN AMERICAN FANTASY LITERATURE FOR YOUNG ADULTS SINCE 1950

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of The School of Continuing Studies and of The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Liberal Studies

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the portrayal of evil in young adult fantasy novels (books written for readers between the ages of 12 and 18) over the last 60 years as it relates to the notion of Otherness. Using an interdisciplinary approach, I analyze select fantasy novels through the lens of Western ethics to examine the American historical, political and social environment between 1950 and 2014. Using Western ethicists as a guide, reading of the texts exposes underlying themes concerning war and American values of good and evil. The portrayal of war in fantasy fiction for young adults has important implications for understanding how American culture responds to its enemies or anyone who falls outside the white Judeo-Christian mainstream. In the 47 young adult novels examined, I find that American attitudes about war and their enemies, and how we respond to them, have changed since the beginning of the Cold War and the continuing international struggle against terrorism.

Beginning with the 1950s’s fantasies examined, novelists equated the fictional battle between good and evil with the defense of freedom and prosperity. Protagonists defend humanity in a just war against forces whose stated or implied goal is the enslavement or destruction of the human race. In these early novels (those written
between 1950 and 1970), evil is portrayed as a force of nature or the result of the meddling of supernatural beings in the affairs of humans. Later novelists (beginning by 1970 and continuing through the 1980s) portray evil as an outcome of human choice. Inherent in this portrayal remains the belief that the cause the hero fights is just. Human freedom rests on the hero’s victory. The final group of novels, those written in the era after the collapse of the Soviet Union (1990 through 2014), authors explore the danger of seeing the world in binary terms of good and evil, instead positing the idea that the battle itself is the greatest threat to human freedom, prosperity and happiness. In addition, these later novelists explore alternative means of overcoming evil besides eternal conflict and revenge. Finally, I include guiding questions concerning teaching fantasy literature for the purpose of understanding how fantasy literature reflects and addresses issues of social justice in the reader and writer’s consensus reality.
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# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>..........................................................................................................</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>...........................................................................................................</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>...........................................................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1.</td>
<td>CHILDREN’S AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2.</td>
<td>DEFINING FANTASY: A DISCURSIVE ART INVOLVING WRITER, READER, TEXT AND THE WORLD</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3.</td>
<td>ROSEMARY JACKSON AND MICHEL FOUCAULT: FANTASY AS A LITERATURE OF SUBVERSION</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4.</td>
<td>DEFINING EVIL: ETHICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO GOOD AND EVIL IN WESTERN THOUGHT</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5.</td>
<td>THE 1950S: THE COLD WAR, CONFORMITY, CONTAINMENT AND CONTRFRONTATION WITH THE OTHER</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 8.</td>
<td>BEYOND SUPERPOWERS AND THE ARMS RACE: DARKNESS, CHAOS AND FATE IN ROBERT JORDAN’S WHEEL OF TIME SERIES</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>...........................................................................................................</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFTERWARD</td>
<td>USING FANTASY NOVELS IN A SOCIAL JUSTICE CURRICULUM</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>...........................................................................................................</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.

~Brandon Sanderson, The Way of Kings

“Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story…”¹ Few opening lines to a tale embody the nature of storytelling as powerfully and succinctly as Homer’s invocation of the Muse in The Odyssey. After calling on the mythical source of inspiration and lending her his voice, Homer spins a fantastic tale that, nearly three thousand years later, still inspires new generations of readers. Like Homer, throughout the long millennia of human history, men and women have communicated with one another through stories about gods and monsters, magic and demons. Whether the poet or listener believed in these impossible elements or not matters little to the story’s success, and, to this day, literature that includes elements of the fantastic continues to offer readers insights into human life: suffering and joy, triumph and defeat, love and fear, and life and death. Stories, all stories, open windows into worlds beyond our imagination or into our own backyards. Through stories a people communicates to the world its most fundamental truths.

Carl Jung, Sir James George Frazer, and Joseph Campbell all document the way our earliest ancestors used myth to posit answers to their questions about the world and life: where did we come from? why are we here? what happens when we die? In addition, legends, fairy tales, and the literature of every culture on Earth further explore questions that have baffled humankind throughout the millennia of human consciousness: what

does it mean to be good? why does evil exist? what is evil’s origin? In every culture, in every corner of the globe, some of the most memorable stories that respond to these questions fall in the realm of the fantastic.

In this thesis, I explore how American fantasy literature expresses America’s most deeply held beliefs about the nature of good and evil and the Other. Specifically, I examine American fantasy novels written for or read by young adults—readers between the ages of 12 and 18—since 1950. Through these works, I examine the way fantasy writers portray good and evil. I place those portrayals side by side with the images American young people have encountered about who we are as a nation in the pages of newspapers, in political rhetoric, on television, and on the Internet in an effort to uncover whom Americans have defined as the enemy over the last 65 years.

Understanding whom the United States sees as Other is especially important in an environment in which American commercial and military power remain the strongest in the world. On a daily basis American youth witness the effects of diverse and often conflicting belief systems on world events. In fantasy literature, protagonists’ responses to evil convey messages about approaching the Other. Deciphering those messages remains urgent for educators and parents preparing young people to understand the confusing, contradictory, and often frightening confrontations with Otherness that they encounter through modern media and in their textbooks.

**Why Young Adult Literature**

While some works of fantasy such as the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling, *The Lord of the Rings*, by J. R. R. Tolkien, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C. S. Lewis
have received in depth scrutiny, critics have largely overlooked fantasy works written for young adults, until recently. Research on fantasy is currently in a state of flux as both the publishing industry and academic communities respond to the explosion of works in the genre written specifically for children and young adults over the last two decades. Furthermore, scholarship on children’s literature has traditionally fallen outside the domain of university English and literature departments, and is commonly considered the purview of Language Arts and Reading departments of Schools of Education. In fact, much of the discussion concerning books written for children and young adults is addressed to teachers and librarians. Although fantasy literature received little notice from academic critics until recently, currently the field is experiencing a burgeoning of interest as more new and established writers begin to create fantasy works for young adults. Furthermore as the body of fantasy literature matures, the critical literature follows in its wake.


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2 In Chapter 1, I address the pedagogical tradition of literature written for children and young adults.
specifically for children. Although works of literature for children between the ages of 10 and 18 have always been a part of the body of children’s literature, the establishment of “young adult” literature as a category within the field is a fairly recent phenomenon.

Any discussion of the category of young adult literature is fraught with obstacles and confusion. There is little consensus among librarians, book publishers, readers, and booksellers on how young adult literature differs from either books written for younger children (under 10) or adults (readers over 18). This is partly because, until recently, literature for young adults was an ambiguous category used by book sellers and librarians to signal certain expectations about a book’s content or readership. However, there was little to no established consensus as to what was or was not considered a work of young adult literature. Critics were unsure how to approach books with mature content and a distinctly youthful worldview, even though works for young people between ages 10 and 18 have been written consistently over the last 150 years. Booksellers and educators devised their own very personal parameters concerning who should read what among this varied reading material.

For the purposes of this thesis, I define young adult literature as literature written for an audience generally between the ages of 12 and 18. In such works the protagonists are most often that age as well, or the work covers a period of time over which the character(s) grow from adolescence into adulthood, as in Poul Anderson’s *The Broken Sword* (see Chapter 5) or Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson’s *Wheel of Time* series (Chapter 8). In addition, unlike literature intended for younger readers, i.e. middle-grade readers or elementary school-age children, works for young adults contain content considered “mature.” In the pages of modern young adult literature readers often
encounter graphic violence and sexual tension—including descriptions of all kinds of sexual activity, and the exploration of personal sexuality and sexual identity, as well. Often stories written for young adults include coming of age stories, first loves, and concern issues of sexual or substance abuse, or dysfunctional family dynamics in a way that is more open or explicit than works for younger readers.

Although those who write, sell, critique, and publish young adult literature insist that there is no easy definition to fall back on when discussing what young adult literature is, many who comment on YA literature and who share it with young readers note that one of its most prominent characteristics is its tone and its voice. Often the stories and characters written for this age reader evoke an immediacy that is different from literature written for adults.\(^3\) Immediacy in works for teenagers often manifests itself in the timeframe of the story’s narration. In YA literature, the narrator tells the story as he or she is living it, or as if the events of the story have only recently occurred. In books written for an adult audience about young adults, the storyteller often narrates the story from the perspective of adulthood or after the passage of time. This gives books written for adults a more reflective tone even when the protagonist is an adolescent or young adult. Furthermore, YA stories are often written from a first person point of view, or from a close-in third person perspective.\(^4\) In addition, the POV is often seated firmly in the


\(^4\) Stories written for adults in which the protagonist is an adolescent tend to reflect a mature outlook on the events of the story that would not be available to the protagonist at the time the story takes place. Anthony Doerr’s work, *All the Light We Cannot See*, winner of the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, is an excellent example of this more reflective, distant tone that stories written for adults often adopt. In that story, the author chooses to tell the story from the third person point of view, and although it is written in
perspective of the young adult protagonist, rather than moving between the character’s nemesis or antagonist, or a character observing the protagonist. Finally, the language and tone, while not universally so, often employs the character’s voice, using humor or irreverence to convey a character’s convictions or views, or to express irony or satire. Such literary devices might be lost on younger children or feel superfluous or juvenile to adult readers.

**Why Fantasy**

Fantasy as a body of literature has a long and storied past. Professor of humanities at Roosevelt University in Chicago and author and editor of numerous works of fantasy and science fiction, as well as critical explorations of the field, Gary Wolfe calls fantasy the purest form of storytelling. In addition, fantasy author and literary giant, C. S. Lewis, in his essay, “On Stories,” claims that “stories [that] introduce the marvelous or supernatural…are…often misunderstood.” But, he asserts, “the marvels in a good Story are never mere arbitrary fictions, stuck on to make the narrative more sensational.” In that essay Lewis eloquently explains how fantasy elements, such as the invulnerable magic of an enemy, heighten the adventure, tension, or humor of the tale by multiplying meaning. In the hands of fantasy authors, magic, monsters, prophecy, and telepathy metaphorically explore power, difference, freedom, and compassion in the reader’s present tense, its voice and tone reflect a more mature, distant sensibility about the events in the story than one would normally find in books written for young adults.

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world. By engaging the creative imagination of the reader through metaphor as I discuss in Chapter 2, fantasy writers express truths about the consensus reality of the reader by hiding them in an impossible world.

Fantasy’s overall metaphorical structure liberates the writer from all restrictions, material as well as cultural—those of science, faith, and tradition—and allows a writer to manipulate and refract the realities of life to suit his or her own storytelling ends and convey new meaning. Furthermore, by employing an image of a hero confronting a demon, or a novice sorcerer learning to control magic, writers bypass the adolescent’s natural impulse to question or reject material that, in overtly drawing parallels to the reader’s world, feels didactic. By evoking “wonder, mystery, or magic,” fantasy writers invite the reader’s participation in unraveling complex solutions to seemingly insurmountable, often world- threatening problems.

As Lewis explains, and I discuss in Chapter 2, “The whole quality of the imaginative response” in the reader is heightened when the “enemies are giants,” or wield magic. That is because, as Lewis writes, “in the imagination, where the [reaction] does not rise to abject terror and is not discharged in action, the qualitative difference is much stronger.” The reader is able to respond to fear or terror or hate without fearing for his or her life.

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Why Fantasy, and Not Science Fiction, or Horror, or Fairy Tales

In order to limit the scope of my study, I focus primarily on works categorized by critics, librarians, fans, and publishers as fantasy. Briefly, fantasy at its most basic is literature which deals with the “impossible.” That definition excludes science fiction and horror, despite the fact that those fictional modes often fall with the fantastic in the category of speculative fiction.

In an interview published at the end of a 2006 audio production of his fantasy, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, Ray Bradbury discussed the difference between science fiction and fantasy. He explains: “Science Fiction is the art of the possible. Fantasy is the art of the impossible.” Concerning horror, John Clute, author and critic of science fiction, horror and fantasy writes in *The Darkening Garden: A Short Lexicon of Horror* that he divides speculative fiction into two sub-categories related to the way the story concerns itself with the reader’s materiality, calling reality a “prison.” According to Clute stories either force us to be “bound-to-the-planet” or are a “ticket to leave.” Horror and science fiction approach consensus reality differently than does fantasy. Horror, he says:

. . . exposes the nature of our world to which we are bound….Fantasy, on the other hand, articulates (and steps beyond)…[by escaping] the prison—to the

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9 I discuss a definition of fantasy in Chapter 2.


12 Ibid., 34.
shaming of history through leaving it….Science Fiction is that division of fantasy which *reasons* with the prison.”¹³

For Clute, fantasy allows the imagination to go beyond the walls of our material “prison,” while horror and science fiction must maintain contact with it. While each of these bodies of literature fall outside the category of realism, each one articulates meaning based on a specific relationship to the world of the reader. Only fantasy escapes our world completely and provides the reader with an “escape from the prison into a truer world.”¹⁴

By stripping the consensus reality of the complexities and contingencies that hide truths about such things as power, privilege, freedom, and fear, and creating worlds where such concepts are laid bare, fantasy illuminates our world even as it departs from it. Furthermore, fantasy offers the writer an opportunity to comment directly on the contingencies of the consensus reality, such as who holds power and who is marginalized, while disassociating his or her comments from the reader’s world by building a fictional “reality” from scratch in which different contingencies can be manifested.¹⁵

Although some see science fiction as a peculiarly American speculative art form,¹⁶ I focus on the literature of the impossible by U.S. writers because less attention has been paid to fantasy as a field than science fiction. I am interested in examining the

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¹³ Ibid., 72 (emphasis added).


way fantasy writers explore the concepts of good and evil in “truer worlds,” worlds that are free of the binds that circumscribe science fiction and horror.

Finally, although fantasy is rooted in traditional myth, legend, fairy tales, and fable, and many modern retellings of traditional fables and fairy tales populate today’s libraries and book stores, I focus on original\(^{17}\) stories by American authors since 1950 in order to examine the changes in the way evil and the Other have been portrayed over the last 65 years. For these reasons, all the stories I have chosen to examine will fall specifically in the fantastic category as I further define it in Chapter 2.

**An Interdisciplinary Approach**

Gary Wolfe suggests that studying fantasy as a critic requires a vocabulary and concepts that come from a variety of academic disciplines and cultural perspectives. Specifically, Wolfe explains that analyzing fantasy requires the “synthesis of critical discourses sufficiently malleable to address the fluidity that…has increasingly come to characterize…fantastic literature.”\(^{18}\) Understanding and evaluating fantasy, has, he says:

...evolved in fandom, in commercial publishing, [and] in traditions of scholarship devoted principally to realistic literature [that] have met up with terms from the social sciences and from such interdisciplinary domains as myth study, semiotics, popular culture, and structuralism.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{17}\) Many of the stories I examine in the chapters that follow include elements that spring from fable, myth or earlier fantasy works. By “original” I signal that the plots, characters, or settings within the fantasy novels do not adhere to the plots, sequences or outcomes of the original fable, myth, or fantasy. Nonetheless, many fantasy writers depend on a shared cultural knowledge of the conventions of a myth, fable, or fantasy, as well as the reader’s knowledge of those myths, fables, and fantasies to build meaning. For example, in his 1954 work *The Broken Sword*, which I discuss in Chapter 5, Poul Anderson relies on the reader recognizing numerous elements of Nordic myth, such as Odin’s appearance or the cursed sword *Tryfing*, in order to allow the story’s multiple meanings to unfold.

\(^{18}\) Gary Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres*, 188.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., xii.
According to Wolfe, then, studying fantasy demands a flexibility of approach and a
diverse set of tools that no singular disciplinary approach provides. Therefore, my
investigation of fantasy uses an interdisciplinary approach. I examine fantasy through the
lenses Michel Foucault’s discourse analysis offers in helping to understand literature as a
node of meaning in American culture. In order to do so, I focus on the historical context,
both domestically and internationally, to investigate a work’s connections to the culture
of its origin. In Chapters 5 through 9, I begin each chapter with an overview of the
historical social and political background of the United States. In that overview I discuss
both international and domestic enemies. Groups who are marginalized socially,
economically or politically in the United States domestic sphere help to identify who
Americans consider to be part of the mainstream and who are the Other. In addition,
throughout my examination of the novels themselves, I compare the principles
expounded by Western philosophers, theologians, and ethicists, such as Plato, Martin
Luther, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, in order to evaluate the activities
in a story and determine the nature and source of evil in the fantasy world. These thinkers
offer a framework for understanding how Americans connect ideas about evil to an
enemy’s actions and goals. In this way, I trace changing American perceptions about
what constitutes evil in American society, and how the Other is portrayed within the
fantasy novels of specific social environments between 1950 and 2014.

Framing the Analysis

To frame my analysis of the fantasy literature, I rely on thinkers and critics who
have written on the nature of culture, narrative, fantasy, and ethics. In Chapter 1, I
explore the way that stories, especially stories for young people, perform a pedagogical function in cultures. Chapter 2 presents a discussion of what fantasy is and how it operates as a grand metaphorical structure that combines mimesis and imagination to create a lens through which to safely and critically comment on the consensus reality. In addition, I discuss what critics assert is a specific rhetorical stance on the part of the writer and a specific approach to reading on the part of the audience when a fantasy text is involved. I am primarily interested in the interaction of the fantasy text with the reader and what he or she must do to begin to construct both the text’s content and meaning.

In Chapter 3, I discuss how Rosemary Jackson’s ideas on fantasy as a subversive form of art and Michel Foucault’s concept of discourse analysis see fantasy literature as nodes of meaning which interconnect and exchange meanings within a network of historical and cultural contingencies at the time of the work’s writing and publication. Such interconnections and exchanges occur unconsciously within the reader’s mental construction of meaning. Through my analysis of the young adult fantasy I intend to bring these connections and exchanges to the level of consciousness so that parents and educators better understand the meanings fantasies convey about the Other.

In Chapter 4, I explore the main philosophical and theological thinkers who have influenced Western notions of right and wrong and good and evil that underpin American ideals of moral behavior. Writers such as Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Martin Luther, Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Hans-Georg Gadamer sought to demarcate standards concerning behavior for Western society. In this way they created a Western system of ethics against which the behavior of our enemies—the Other—is compared. Throughout my analysis of the fantasy literature itself, as I discuss below, I
apply these thinkers’ ideas on the norms of behavior and their ideas on the origin of evil
in order to determine who or what the fantasy world considers evil.

In Chapters 5 through 9, I begin my analysis of fantasy literature itself. In each
chapter I explore how the writer conveys a notion of evil and the Other by looking
specifically at story, plot, character, theme, imagery, setting, and tone. In these chapters, I
determine what the protagonists face as the cause of “evil” or war in the novels. I
specifically examine the antagonists’ goals, and the actions he/she/it takes to achieve
them. Furthermore I look at the effects of those actions on the world within the book
(world domination, power monopolization, species annihilation, environmental
degradation, personal power, or immortality). Additionally, I study the protagonist’s
response to the antagonist and the means by which the protagonist resists or confronts
evil (e.g., through magic or military prowess). I focus on a protagonist’s motives for
confronting the antagonist (e.g., personal vendetta, a sense of duty, or because he or she
is compelled by fate). My goal is to identify patterns concerning the battle between good
and evil as portrayed by fantasy authors over the 65 years of fantasies I read, and how the
characters—the heroes and villains—respond to one another.

Finally, in an Afterward, for teachers who wish to explore social justice issues
with students, I offer guiding questions concerning identity, perspective, and language.
By discussing these concepts in literature, we equip students to examine their own lives.

Scope of the Research

Jeffery J. Cohen, director of George Washington University’s Medieval and Early
Modern Studies Institute explains in Monster Theory, Reading Culture that throughout
history humans have demonized or made “monstrous” those who are different. In undertaking this examination of American fantasy literature, I investigate the insights works for young adults offer about how Americans have demonized our enemies by emphasizing the ways we perceive them to be different from us. An examination of the demons made manifest through fantasy literature reveals American society’s “monsters:” those whose beliefs are so different from ours and whose actions deviate from our ethical beliefs so much that they justify war against them. Jason Edwards, assistant professor of communication studies at Bridgewater State University explains in his work, *Navigating the Post-Cold War World: President Clinton’s Foreign Policy Rhetoric*, that American leaders throughout history use rhetoric heavily laced with references to evil to describe the actions of our enemies in order to rally support for violence against them, or justify their marginalization (such as African Americans, Muslims, and gays and lesbians). Current political rhetoric characterizes America’s enemies’ actions as “repulsive savagery,” or a horrific “scourge,” and call for the United States to “bomb them back to the Stone Age.” By contrasting our enemy’s actions and beliefs to our own, American leaders effectively create a dichotomy between “us” and “them,” between ourselves and the Other. This *othering* of those who are not “us” throughout the second half of the 20th


century and the first decades of the 21st, at times included Americans who fell outside the white, heterosexual, Christian norm of the presumed mainstream U.S. culture. By seeking evidence of these Others as the enemy in the fantasy literature I examine, I expose the messages American culture conveys about how to approach those who are considered to be different.

In portraying those who perpetrate acts that threaten the beliefs or the fictional society’s existence as monsters or evil fantasy writers contribute value-laden ideas about those who challenge American beliefs and values, and thereby transform the Other in the consensus reality into “monsters” as well. Examining whom fantasy literature portrays as evil or monstrous, and which beliefs they threaten, helps frame the larger discussion of how we, as a society, respond to differences and conflict with our enemies. Understanding the messages about the Other, to whom young people are exposed through fantasy literature, is especially urgent in the multicultural social and political context of contemporary American society. Depending on whether the stories young adults read teach intolerance and intransigence or celebrate and encourage acceptance of differences, the models of how to approach the Other found in fantasy literature have serious society-wide ramifications.

In an effort to discern what models of dealing with the Other fantasy literature offers young people, I examined 47 best-selling, critically-acclaimed, and award-winning fantasy novels or series published between 1950 and 2014, that depict societies at war. All were written by American authors. In Chapter 5, I examine Poul Anderson’s Three Hearts and Three Lions (1953) and The Broken Spear (1954). In Chapter 6, I turn to Andre Norton’s original Witch World titles (1963–1968). Chapter 7 covers a period of
extraordinary change in the United States and the world spanning the years between 1964
and 1989. The literature published during those years serves as a bridge between two
distinct ways of thinking about the Other and evil as I explain there. In that chapter I
examine Lloyd Alexander’s *Prydain Chronicles*, (1964-1968), Virginia Hamilton’s
Justice series (1978-1982), and Ursula Le Guin’s Earth Sea Cycle, which, with its latest
volume, extends from 1968 to 2001. In Chapter 8, I examine the epic fantasy series
Wheel of Time. Robert Jordan published the first book of this fourteen-volume work in
1990 and followed it with ten additional volumes until his untimely death in 2009.
Brandon Sanderson, author of numerous works of fantasy of his own, completed the final
four volumes of the series writing from extensive notes left by Jordan. The final book
was published in 2013 to great critical and fan acclaim. The final group of novels I
discuss in Chapter 9 covers works published since 2000. In that chapter I examine
Margaret Atwater-Rhodes’s Kiesha’ra series (2003-2008), Christopher Paolini’s
Inheritance Cycle (2003-2011), and Laini Taylor’s Daughter of Smoke and Bone
sequence (2011-2014).

In all the novels I examine in this thesis, the main protagonists are teenagers, or
were children or teenagers in the opening novel of the series with two exceptions: Poul
Anderson’s *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, and the first two volumes of the Witch World
Series, by Andre Norton. I include Anderson and Norton because they represent two of
the most widely read authors during the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, the protagonists in
Robert Jordan’s and Brandon Sanderson’s Wheel of Time series, age from adolescence to
adulthood over the length of the series.
In addition, each novel focuses on the activities of the young adult protagonists as they battle their societies’ enemies. One exception is Atwater-Rhodes’s Kiesha’ra series, which, in later volumes, focuses on the struggle to overcome the fear, mistrust, and hatred the two societies harbor for one another after a recently established and tenuous peace between them. By examining stories that treat a society’s wars, I found images that reflect American international enemies, as well as metaphorical portrayals of the marginalized or repressed members of our society.

Furthermore, I discuss series of fantasy works that have been critically acclaimed and also widely read by young people. The fantasy series by these writers have been read by millions of children and young adults over the years and have won numerous accolades and prizes. I examine American authors only, and only their works in which the protagonists and their societies are at war with some force they perceive to be deadly enemies or evil. In this way I hope to trace changes that occurred in the way Americans perceive their enemies and the means we employ to overcome them.

**Conclusion: Evil in a Globalized World**

When René Descartes questioned our ability to know anything about the world, he set in motion centuries of efforts to ground all knowledge on Enlightenment notions of reason. As a result of this project, Enlightenment thinkers were forced to question the very foundations of Western concepts of morality, ideas previously considered terra firma—the truths of the Judeo-Christian revelation. With such a move a new philosophical problem came into sharp relief: how could a society build a system of moral behavior founded on reason alone? How could a society agree on notions of right
and wrong, truth, justice, and right behavior if not on traditional Judeo-Christian religious dogma? Thinkers who led to the construction of what today is known as modernism systematically had to reconstruct, from the ground up, a universal, rational basis for morality and ethics. Their work was made even more urgent in the twenty-first century with the advent of globalization, instantaneous communication, social media activism, and the ease of maintaining interpersonal, political, and economic interconnections across cultures and societies. As governments lose control of the public discourse around international events because news media outlets and communication has become more diffused, agreement on what is evil and what is a justifiable reaction to it have become more and more complex. From moment to moment, individuals in communities across the globe are able to witness world-changing events via Internet and social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+, and YouTube. These outlets bring people into contact with others who hold views or espouse beliefs that contradict or seem to be in direct opposition to their own. When belief systems conflict, questions about right and wrong, freedom and power, and fundamental precepts such as equity, justice, and identity need to be newly interpreted. To further add to the confusion, diverse religious convictions, social practices, and traditions within cultures in the same society cause tension as well, especially when beliefs and practices contradict or conflict with one another. Within the United States, debates around undocumented workers, gay marriage, gender identity, the death penalty, abortion, gun ownership, and civil liberties, to name just a few, have sown discord within what previously appeared to be a community grounded on a common belief system. Whether a truly monolithic ethical system ever actually existed in the United States, or is instead the result of nostalgia for an idealized
past, the grounding of our moral behavior on one common “grand narrative” is no longer possible. While the dominant culture in the United States historically has been perceived to be white and Christian, a closer examination of U.S. demographics shows that a wide variety of religions and ethnic groups exist side by side, and have done so with more or less success since the first Europeans settled on the North American continent.

Furthermore, in the United States, multiple cultures’ grand narratives have exerted powerful influences on America’s moral outlook as evidenced by the multiplicity of belief systems found in North America. Because of this, it is no longer possible to assume a homogeneous or universal understanding of what Americans consider to be the basis for discussions of good and evil, or right and wrong.

Such confusion leads directly to questions of how to define evil, who is one of us, and who is the Other. This “Us versus Them” dichotomy charges any conflict with urgency concerning the response to the Other.

My research does not constitute a comprehensive study of fantasy. Hundreds of thousands of pages of fantasy for young adults have been published since 1950. Nevertheless, the works I include represent some of the most popular works of fantasy written by American authors in the period covered. Through them, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the nature of the battle against what Americans perceived to be evil. With that in mind, I offer the following observations.

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My exploration of young adult fantasy literature demonstrates that although American notions of evil, as expressed in that literature, has varied little over the course of the last 65 years, a change in the way fantasy characters respond to evil has occurred. As the United States’ stature has grown in the world since the end of World War II, American leaders and news media have routinely portrayed the United States’ enemies, from the Soviet Union to terrorists, as the source of evil which seeks world domination or the annihilation of our culture and freedoms. In the pages of fantasy novels, evil manifests itself in forces of power that seek world domination, perpetrate acts of savagery, enslave or defile humans and other creatures, and cause death—or worse—a loss of free will.

Whether evil manifests itself as a threat to a world’s or a society’s existence, as it does in Jordan and Sanderson’s, Taylor’s, and Atwater-Rhodes’s novels, or it manifests itself through the individual choices of those who would enslave humanity, as in Norton’s, Paolini’s or Alexander’s works, evil requires a response. It is in the response to that evil that fantasy writers reveal the most fundamental beliefs about community, what it means to be human, the importance of freedom, and forgiveness.

In examining fantasy literature, I found that fantasy writers’ responses to the Other have changed since the Cold War. Once the heroes of fantasy works fought bravely against a demonized foe, believing their cause to be just, and victory imperative for the freedom or survival of all free creatures, as in Poul Anderson’s work, Three Hearts and Three Lions. The latest works of fantasy, however, including those by Robert Jordan, Christopher Paolini, Amelia Atwater-Rhodes, and Laini Taylor, demonstrate that to battle evil a society must shift its perspective by re-defining what victory and peace look like.
In my discussion in Chapter 4 on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the fantasy of Virginia Hamilton among others, and in Chapters 7 through 9, writers dramatize this more open approach to confronting those who are Other. In an effort to understand the position of the enemy and to move beyond the need to defeat it at all costs, writers offer alternative means by which to confront evil. On the pages of recent fantasy novels, in particular those written since the liminal national events of September 11, 2001, characters seek to move beyond vengeance and violence, and seek instead understanding, peace, and forgiveness. It is through the works of contemporary fantasy writers, then, that I find reason to hope that Americans as a people may be able to move beyond a “victory-at all-costs” mentality to a perspective which speaks of peace by whatever means possible.

Finally, the writers I examine embody what Percy Bysshe Shelley knew to be the most effective way to convey moral precepts to children, the poet’s imagination. In A Defense of Poetry, Shelley writes, “The great instrument of moral good is the imagination…Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.”

Using tools of the creative imagination, writers such as Poul Anderson, Ursula Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Victoria Hamilton, Robert Jordan and others offer powerful messages about the nature of evil and the way societies and individuals confront it. In doing so they offer lessons to young people about the world they live in and how they, too, may be called upon in wartime and

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in peace, or in victory and defeat to respond to questions of right and wrong, and good and evil.
CHAPTER 1

CHILDREN’S & YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE:
THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY

There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories.

~Ursula K. Le Guin

Introduction

According to Ursula K. Le Guin, author of more than 100 works of fiction, essays and articles, and recipient of dozens of awards for writing and her lifetime contribution to American letters, “story—from Rumpelstiltskin to War and Peace—is one of the basic tools invented by the [human] mind…for the purpose of gaining understanding.”

No other capacity separates human beings from animals so fundamentally as our ability and propensity to connect with each other through story. Kathi Appelt, prizewinning author of books for young readers, says:

[W]e are the “story animals.” We're built for telling stories, and our penchant for doing so separates us from the other animals—who as far as we know—don't tell stories. It's in us, as much as to eat and drink and find shelter, to tell our stories. We find solace, community, and worship in stories. In fact, stories are so powerful that we go to war over them.

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1Le Guin’s famous statement has been quoted in numerous works about the award-winning author, but was first published in Ursula K. Le Guin, “Prophets and Mirrors: Science Fiction as a Way of Seeing,” Living Light, 7.3 (Fall 1970). I found it in Ursula K Le Guin, Language of the Night, Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction, ed. Susan Wood (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1979), 21.

2 Ibid. This sentence is the continuation of the previous quote.

3 Personal email communication from Kathi Appelt, dated December 8, 2009. Appelt’s comment reveals a fundamental premise of this thesis: The beliefs we go to war over demarcate who we are as a people and who and what we consider to be “Other.”
Underlying Le Guin’s and Appelt’s comments is the notion that through our stories we reveal our most fundamental beliefs as a community, beliefs that we are willing to defend with our lives. In this way ever since human beings learned to communicate with one another, we have applied the structures and tools of a narrative to convey an understanding of the world and ourselves. By identifying who we are, however, we also begin to identify who we are not. In this chapter, I explore various thinkers’ attempts to explain how stories help cultures communicate core beliefs.

**Children’s Stories as Pedagogical Texts**

Whether a story is meant for the very young, for an adolescent poised on the threshold of adulthood, or for the most erudite and sophisticated of readers, the narrative structure has been used to help us share our experiences for millennia. Familiarity with the narrative structure found in even the simplest of stories seems to be wired into the human psyche. In *Poetics*, Aristotle broke down the components of a tragedy, the form he considered the highest of all stories, into elements that even the youngest students in middle school recognize and understand. Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Plots consist of selected events ordered to best convey their importance or meaning. Characters and their struggles must treat subjects that a culture deems to be worthy of our attention.

Aristotle offers the simplest of explanations of what a poet does. He wrote:

> . . . The poet is engaged in imitation, just like a painter or anyone else who produces visual images, and the object of his imitation must in every case be one of three things: either the kind of thing that was or is the case; or the kind of thing that is said or thought to be the case; or the kind of thing that ought to be the case.⁴

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To Aristotle, stories tell us what the world is like, what people believe it to be like, and what we hope it will be like. In his final “ought,” Aristotle goes to the very heart of how stories teach. Through the simple conveyance of a culture’s hopes for itself, a story conveys its core beliefs for future generations. Among those beliefs is how we ought to treat one another. In expressing this “ought” writers throughout the long millennia of human history have offered powerful answers to question concerning what it means to be “good.” In shedding light on that question we find another answer in its shadow: what it means to be “evil.”

An exploration of fairy tales, poetry, novels, myths, and plays shows that some of the most creative minds in history have explored the nature of good and evil. Explanations of what it means to be good and why evil exists in the universe seem as varied and contradictory as the minds that posit them or the eras in which they were written. These varying approaches reflect a shifting paradigm about notions of human behavior that Richard Bernstein discusses in Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis. The problem, as Bernstein notes, concerns our modern cultural angst emerging from a fundamental conflict between two competing outlooks on human understanding. He offers the following description of the conflict between relativists and objectivists:

. . . In its strongest form, relativism is the basic conviction that when we turn to the examination of those concepts that philosophers have taken to be most fundamental—whether it is the concept of rationality, truth, reality, right, the good, or norms—we are forced to recognize that in the final analysis all such concepts must be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture. Since the relativist believes that there is (or can be) an irreducible plurality of such conceptual schemes, he or she challenges the claim that these concepts can have a determinate and univocal significance. For the relativist, there is no substantive
overarching framework or single meta-language by which we can rationally adjudicate or univocally evaluate competing claims of alternative paradigms.\(^5\)

For Bernstein, then, rationalism, despite all the other benefits it has brought humankind, has muddied our understanding of the world and with it universal agreement on right and wrong. If the concepts of good and evil are part of an irreducible plurality of ways of looking at the world, absent a single over-arching grand narrative, confusion reigns.

Some commentators argue that a loss of moral certainty grows out of the pragmatism and moral relativism brought on by postmodern confusion evident in Bernstein’s work. Social critics of the cultural uncertainty noted by Bernstein, such as Vigen Guroian, Susan Ang, and William Bennett,\(^6\) reject subjectivism, pragmatism, and cultural relativism. They suggest that one of the most important ways to instill in our young people a firm moral ground upon which to build character and values is through the stories they read. In order to accomplish this mission, they seek to confine the themes offered in literature for children to straightforward messages about the transcendence of love, the immortality of the soul, the punishment of evil, and redemption as a final reward. They call attention to the lessons conveyed in the narratives to which we expose our young people on television, in film, and in works of fiction. In *Tending the Heart of Virtue, How Classic Stories Awaken a Child’s Moral Imagination*, Guroian begins his efforts at fashioning a moral road map for young readers by carefully examining the traditional stories he believes offer clear lessons in the themes he views most important.


For critics such as Guroian, Ang, and Bennett, literature, especially literature for young people, has a primarily pedagogical purpose and provides a prime means to solve the postmodern dilemma. By focusing works for young people on values articulated by religious teachings and faith, society can shift the balance back to what they perceive to be a unified vision of right and wrong. While one might disagree with Guroian, Ang, and Bennett about what stories should teach, the belief that stories do teach is as old as story itself.

**How Stories Teach**

Philosophers, poets, religious figures, and politicians have all used story to convey lessons. Examples abound: Plato’s dialogues in which Socrates is the main protagonist, the parables of Christ in the Gospels, the creation stories recited by shaman at Maya rituals, the fairy tales, fables, and myths we hear as young people; even the complex philosophical fictional explorations of works like Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. All forms of stories have long been used as pedagogical tools. Similarly, going as far back as Plato, theories about how stories teach also abound.

Plato, however, through the voice of Socrates in *The Republic*, found the effect of story on the citizens of Athens problematic. He excoriated poets and playwrights from Homer to the great dramatists of the theater of his day for the very reason that their stories distracted citizens from the contemplation of Truth as it was embodied in the realm of the Ideal. According to Socrates, the works of poets and playwrights removed the observer by a factor of three from the Ideal form of the object the artist intended to portray. Therefore, Socrates considered stories not strictly adhering to Truth no better
than deception. Plato wanted men to contemplate pure forms as free of imitations (and interpretations) as possible. Poetry was a diversion from the Ideal that could not be tolerated in his hypothetical Republic.

Furthermore, for Plato, because artists and poets hoped to evoke passionate responses to their work from patrons and audiences – the stronger the better – they were complicit in the free release of passion which defied Plato’s insistence on the submission of the passions to Reason. Only by keeping emotions in check, he argued, could a well-ordered society succeed and thrive. The success of the polis required the banishment of the poets.

Other philosophers and critics have seen the pedagogical aspects of literature in a more positive light, Plato’s rejection notwithstanding. Philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer assert that aesthetic objects, literature included, provide us with a mode of knowledge that, although different from scientific understanding, is “unique” in the kinds of truth they convey.\(^7\) Gadamer’s discussion of hermeneutics describes how a reader creates new meaning from a text, even when the text’s context may be far removed from the reader’s experience or knowledge. Understanding, he explains, is achieved through the process of foregrounding one’s own knowledge and prejudices. By prejudices, Gadamer means the historical contingencies of our lives, “the historicity of our being”\(^8\) and “the conditions whereby we experience something–whereby what we encounter says


\(^8\) Ibid., 159.
something to us.” Foregrounding, or bringing these “conditions” into our consciousness so they can be examined along side the text, allows an observant reader to set aside subjective “prejudices” and lets the text speak from its own context and convey understanding. In this way, the reader achieves a depth of understanding and constructs meaning that goes beyond the original context, purpose, or intent of the aesthetic object’s creator. Similarly, stories, no matter what their context, original purpose, or content are able to speak to a listener, or a reader, whose life and existence is outside the ken of the text’s author. In other words, stories, no matter how foreign or distant the reader, convey meanings that are outside the author’s control. In this thesis, and the chapters that follow, I explore the ways fantasy literature provides a venue in which the reader sets aside his or her subjective prejudices and adopts new perspectives suggested by the author. In doing so a work of fantasy provides a means by which a reader allows the text to say something new to him or her.

Northrop Frye, distinguished literary critic and theorist, in his discussions of the literal and symbolic meanings found in literature, recognizes both the descriptive and didactic potential of narratives. Because of the metaphorical nature of language itself, Frye’s theories on how narratives and poetry convey meaning leads him to conclude that, more than being solely a mimetic representation of life, all art, and literature specifically, has an important symbolic and thus didactic element. In fact, he suggests the mimetic component of literature is essential to its didacticism. A literary work does not directly

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9 Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism, 127.

10 In Chapter 2, I discuss fantasy as a body of literature that acts as a mode of rhetoric that some critics believe has the capacity to influence a reader’s thinking and action.
reflect an idea, event, or natural phenomenon, but offers a means by which those things may be transferred, understood, appreciated, and interpreted. 11

In order to achieve the goals Frye anticipates, the observer must first approach a work of art, understand its immediate or surface meaning, and then step back, both figuratively in our minds, and sometimes by physically putting a work aside. By removing oneself from the object of art and considering the work as a whole, one allows the artwork’s full unity to become present. In that way the work’s complex metaphorical meaning may come to light. By stepping away from a work and contemplating its unity, we begin finally to step into it and allow the more complex meanings free reign on our imaginations. More importantly, though, Frye believed that stories which include elements of the fantastic, in all their forms, have been most effective in teaching cultural values beyond their immediate mimetic content throughout the long history of human stories, from Homer’s epic poems The Iliad and The Odyssey, and the Judeo-Christian Bible, to Dante’s Comedy to J. R. R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings. 12

For example, Dante Alighieri’s Comedy, recounts the journey of a pilgrim from the Dark Woods to Heavenly Paradise. The poem’s universal message of struggle and redemption in the face of human sin and error combines fantastical elements of life after death, a descent into Hell, and an encounter with Virgil with specific details of life in 13th and 14th century Italy. While a reader can understand the meaning of the epic as a strictly fantastical journey through the after-life, it is the mimetic details of Dante’s


environment—the people, places, and events of his world—that drive the narrative’s emotional and literary power. As with all memorable art, the details drawn from the specific daily and emotional life of the artist move the work out of the strict confines of mimesis, the world which the author knew, into the realm of the universal of all readers.

Despite Frye’s affirmation that fantasy literature is an effective means for conveying a culture’s truths, Frye judges fantastic literature to be inferior to realism. However, he does recognize the fantastic as one of the oldest forms of art and literature humankind has produced.13

Frye’s understanding of metaphor and symbolism explain, in part, why fantasy is an effective way to convey moral lessons. By breaking down the internal links between form and meaning—the connection of an image to its agreed significance—and evoking other images and meanings without “explicitly naming them,”14 metaphor in fantasy moves the audience of the work to a different, higher understanding of the artist’s or writer’s purpose. Relying on T. S. Eliot’s “objective correlative,” Frye suggests that such transference of meaning is especially effective when it conveys emotion.15

Research into the role emotions play in learning and understanding sheds new light on how reading literature conveys societal values and lessons. By enabling the reader to see the world through another person’s eyes, stories build an individual’s ability to understand another person’s motivations and emotions. Stories stimulate the brain’s

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13 Frye, Anatomy, 84.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 24, 33, 59, 74. Despite Frye’s assertion that fantasy conveys meaning through metaphor and symbol, he finds that very characteristic to reduce fantasy’s value in the Western literary canon. Fantasy’s reliance on myth, metaphor, and allegory, he believes, narrows and reduces the interpretation of the text to the symbolic. With such a move, Frye says, fantasy leaves too much of the meaning of the text dependent on a reader’s knowledge of a culture’s historical and cultural antecedents.
affective learning centers, generating in the reader emotions that either mirror or parallel
the emotions of the characters in the story. These parallel emotions allow the reader to
experience the story’s emotional content. In addition, stimulating an emotional response
creates a feedback loop that strengthens the reader’s memory of the emotions the story
stimulated. In this way stories are ideal tools for instilling values associated with the
events of the story.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, studies show that literature in particular fosters
personal maturity, has the capacity to change the way readers relate to others, and
increases the reader’s “understanding of others.”\textsuperscript{17} When those emotions convey
important messages concerning courage, empathy, and love, the lessons the story teaches
become deeply imbedded in the reader because they have been carried to him or her on
the back of an experienced emotion.

Recent research that examines brain activity during the reading of literature
reveals the effect literature has on human emotional response. Translating how our minds
react to the pain, pleasure, joy, and sorrow of others, even fictional characters, into data
demonstrating the function of different parts of our brains has led some researchers to
theorize about an evolutionary purpose to story. Researchers claim to have found a link in
how our brains respond to being inside the heads of fictional characters and our need to

\textsuperscript{16} See for example research by Christina Hinton, Koki Miyamoto & Bruno Della-Chiesa. “Brain
Research, Learning and Emotions: Implications for Education Research, Policy and Practice,” \textit{European
Learning,” \textit{New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education}, no. 110, (Summer, 2006): 36-41; Bem Le
Hunte and Jan A. Golembiewski, "Stories have the Power to Save Us: A Neurological Framework for the
Imperative to Tell Stories," \textit{Arts and Social Sciences Journal} 5, no. 2 (July 28, 2014): 73-77.

\textsuperscript{17} Maja Dijkic, Kieth Oatley, Sara Zoeterman, and Jordan Peterson, “On Being Moved by Art:
How Reading Fiction Transforms the Self,” \textit{Creativity Research Journal} 21, no. 1 (2009), 25, 28, accessed
understand the thoughts and motivations of others. According to University of Technology in Australia researchers Bem Le Hunt and Jan Golembiewski, “storytelling…is essential to the way we construct our humanity.” As Kathi Appelt remarked, stories make us human.

Because stories transform human emotions and help convey a society’s attitudes about others, and because the books children read are one means by which they learn to decode, deconstruct, and unpack their culture, it is essential that we examine works of fiction that children read through the lens of social justice pedagogy. Social justice pedagogy highlights the need to evaluate works of literature for children with a specific awareness of how that literature portrays the Other; how power is distributed within the society within the book, and how that power affects the way a society responds to those who are Other. Below I address critical theories on children’s literature as it relates to the body of literature as artistic works.

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19 Le Hunte and Golembiewski, “Stories have the power to save us,” 75.

20 For the past ten years I have taught in an independent school in Washington, DC. In that capacity I have explored the importance of multicultural education and critical literacy to educating 21st century students. Much of my knowledge of the material comes from formal training and conversations with Enid Lee, an anti-bias education specialist and author of numerous books on multicultural education. See especially Enid Lee, Beyond Heroes and Holidays A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development (Washington, DC: Teaching For Change, 1998). In addition, see Louise Derman-Sparks & Julie Olsen Edwards, Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2010); Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson, Literature for Today’s Young Adults (8th edition) (New York: Pearson, 2008).
Critical Approaches To Children’s Literature

Understanding and appreciating children’s literature does not come easily to many critics and adult readers. Opinions about whether or not stories written for children have any value as literature have changed over time. Additionally, even critics who agree that stories written for children can be literature do not agree on which stories qualify and how to evaluate them.

When considering works for children, fundamental problems arise. How should adults approach a body of literature that is written, produced, and evaluated by a class of people whose experience and education are fundamentally different from the class of people who is the intended audience? Inherent in this problem is knowing, from the point of view of the critic, whether or not a work of literature produced for young people, no matter the target’s age, might be truly understood and appreciated by the child; or, by the adults, for that matter. Added to this problem is the underlying intent of the author. Does the writer approach a work differently when writing for children than when he or she writes for adults? And if so, how does that affect the reader’s experience? No matter how one answers these questions, critical analysis of literature written for children currently is gaining in importance in the field of literary appreciation and is a growing field among critics, teachers, librarians, academicians and parents.

Whether one approaches literature based on Plato’s concept of mimesis, Bernstein’s relativism, or Nietzsche’s perspectivism, a view that the same work of art or literature is open to vastly different and incommensurable, even contradictory interpretations, critics do agree that some narrative works written for and consumed by children are worthy of the term literature. Therefore such narratives can and should be
analyzed and judged by critical standards similar to those written and consumed primarily for adults.

**An Aesthetic Approach to Children’s Literature and Fantasy**

Beginning with Aristotle’s *Poetics*, critical thinking about the nature and purpose of art and literature developed despite Plato’s rejection of the poets and playwrights. During the many intervening centuries since Plato, some of history’s greatest thinkers theorized on the nature and purpose of art and aesthetics. In their earliest judgments, theorists and philosophers judged a work of poetry, drama, music, or sculpture on its correspondence to reality. A work of art was deemed to be a success or failure depending on whether or not it allowed the viewer or listener to experience something of the real world without it being directly available to the senses, or without the reader directly experiencing the events that transpire in the poem, drama, or musical composition. This *mimetic* attitude toward a work of art judges how well the artist holds a mirror up to the world.

In this respect, because many works for young people are classified as fantasy, such titles for children and young adults fail the first test. Animals do not talk. Dragons and magic do not exist. Prophecies that change the course of a character’s life depend on lies. Nevertheless, as discussed above, even Northrop Frye believed that as metaphor, fantasies become a cultural node of meaning with the capacity to become a “verbal nucleus of a shared tradition.”

Furthermore, through fantasy, writers explore complex

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issues concerning a culture’s understanding of the nature of good and evil with young people in a manner that is fundamentally more palatable to them.

Other critical approaches to literature have faced similar difficulties when applied to works written for children. For example, critical theories, which seek to understand a work of art based on the express purpose of the artist, question the relevance or appropriateness of a work according to the child reader’s ability to grasp that purpose. Such criticism approaches the child reader as either lacking in necessary understanding of inter-textual or societal references, emotional experience, or his or her ability to articulate the work’s meaning in order to evaluate the author’s purpose. In other words, critics of fantasy find it difficult to evaluate what children have synthesized from a work in order to determine if they fully appreciate and understand it. Such criticisms fail to take into consideration the aesthetic worth of a work, and seek to consider solely the potential intellectual impact of a work on its audience.

When an adult critic seeks to measure a particular work’s impact on a reader, the issue of the critic’s personal ethical or moral position must be considered, as well. Such approaches lead, necessarily, to concerns of censorship. In addition, approaching children’s literature with an emphasis on how it affects its audience can be difficult to document, let alone analyze, when the audience affected is perceived by critics or academics as both less articulate or even unable to express complex thoughts about themselves or about the impression left by something as abstract as a fictional world. Therefore, the very nature of approaching children’s literature as an adult is, to borrow C.
S. Lewis’s suggestion, akin to an anthropologist’s study of alien cultures. Children of every era differ from their adult contemporaries. Age, experience, education, knowledge, and maturity, in addition to historical and societal changes all have an impact on a writer’s and a reader’s approach to a text. All these things may be important to the way adults look at literature, but they do not figure into the choices a young reader makes when deciding what to read, nor the fact that children, like adults, absorb society’s values, for better or worse, through the literature they read, as Foucault documents, and I discuss, in Chapter 3.

Finally, although there is much disagreement about what children’s and young adult literature is, with respect to style, purpose, and content, as discussed in my introductory chapter, fantasy literature meets many of the criteria that concern critics and academia when approaching a body of literature. The fantasy works I discuss demonstrate a high level of technical skill on the part of the writers; they have been admired by critics across the years; they give spontaneous joy; they comply with the recognized fantasy genre forms and content; they have been evaluated and interpreted by recognized critics; they represent an effort to simulate recognizable experiences and aspects of the world; the stories treat themes beyond the mundane life of an ordinary individual; and finally, they consist of or generate imaginative experiences for both the creator and the audience for whom they are written.

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Therefore, I believe it is imperative to understand what fantasy literature written by Americans expresses with respect to the values of good and evil.

**Conclusion**

Story and storytelling is an art as old as the human community itself. At the heart of all critical analysis of children’s literature lies the belief that literature is a means by which meaning, morality, and cultural understanding are conveyed to a younger generation. The concept of *dulce et utile* fits what many critics see as the purpose of literature in general, and applies especially well to children’s literature because of the nature and special conditions of childhood.

Critics agree that for aesthetic purposes works written for children can, and do, demonstrate several important characteristics which not only make it a form of literature, but also a unified field of study. Specifically, fantasy literature for young adults can be characterized as literature because it meets several key aesthetic elements that have come to be recognized by critics as part of what makes an artifact art.

While myths, fairy tales, and stories have been told across the millennium, and may not have always been recognized as literature, they are recognized as a means of teaching and instilling moral foundations in readers and listeners. Children’s literature, then, especially in its more fantastical manifestations, occupies an important place in literary analysis because it is a means by which a society conveys its values to younger generations.
CHAPTER 2

DEFINING FANTASY: A DISCURSIVE ART INVOLVING WRITER, READER, TEXT, AND THE WORLD

…”Reality” is all very well, but…no one in their right mind would want to live there all the time.

~ Geoffrey Summerfield, *Fantasy and Reason.*

Any discussion of fantasy as a genre invariably begins with a discussion of its value as a body of literature. Commentators across generations of critics have weighed in on all sides. One only has to crack the spine of any literary journal or critical commentary on a work of fantasy to find a review of the debate ranging from questions of whether fantasy should be considered escapist pop-culture, and so beneath the attention of academic study, or a high form of imaginative art. In addition, classifying fantasy itself—is it a literary genre? a sub-genre? a rhetorical stance?—is complicated.

Whether or not works of fantasy should be considered of literary merit and thus suitable for academic and critical debate is largely irrelevant to a discussion of how such a body of textual artifacts affects its readership, especially if we assume that the works in question are shown to be widely read. In this chapter, I put aside questions of the value of fantasy as a body of literature. Instead, I examine various theories concerning fantasy in

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order to narrow the field of texts I examine in later chapters. I address theories about
fantasy itself (i.e. what it is), and its relationship to the real world and the reader (its
source in human experience), and how authors and readers work together to construct a
text. I explore how the writer, the reader, and the text interconnect and collaborate to
build meaning. In addition, I examine how fantasy uses allegory and metaphor to convey
that meaning. Like poetry, fantasy employs the experiential and emotional responses of
the reader to build the polysemous nature of the text. Finally, I discuss the writer’s
rhetorical stance—a combination of purpose, tone, and content in a piece of writing—and
its effect on the reader, and the impact that stance has on the reader’s absorption of
meanings communicated through the text.

Defining Fantasy

In addition to academics and literary critics, fantasy writers such as J. R. R.
Tolkien, Ursula Le Guin, and Lloyd Alexander have commented on their art. Fantasy
writer Lloyd Alexander says that “Realism is fantasy pretending to be true; and fantasy is
truth pretending to be a dream.” For others, like Le Guin, fantasy is more akin to
daydream. “It is a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending
and coping with existence. It is not antirational, but pararational, not realistic but

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3 For my purposes, reader response does not refer to the critical approach known as Reader
Response Theory which stresses personal interpretation. While such interpretation also rests on the various
experiential, social, psychological and cultural references of individual readers, I am primarily focused on
the need for emotional, cognitive and aesthetic openness that a reader brings to a fantasy text.


accessed date September 10, 2011.
surrealistic, super-realistic, a heightening of reality."\(^6\) Such a definition emphasizes fantasy’s relationship with the real. As Le Guin explains fantasy does not contradict reality but stands outside it, next to it, or above it in order to emphasize aspects of consensus reality and comment on them. According to these two fantasy writers, fantasy connects to and engages in conversation with the reality of the writer and the reader, rather than rejecting it, despite its rejection of the material rules of the consensus reality.

Tolkien agreed. Credited widely with bringing “faerie-stories” into the academic fold, he believed that faerie-stories made “immediately effective…the beauties and terrors of the world.”\(^7\) For Tolkien, fantasy offers a new perspective on the world, not merely an escape from it. In “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien explains the fairy story this way:

> …[W]hat it is, or what it should be…[depends] upon the nature of Faërie: the Perilous Realm itself and the air that blows in that country….I will say only this: a “fairy-story” is one that touches on or uses Faërie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. Faërie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic.\(^8\)

Tolkien asserts that what sets Faërie apart from other forms of literature, no matter the work’s “main purpose” is a relationship to and use of magic. By Faërie Tolkien does not refer to a specific type of character or story structure. Faërie to Tolkien is the fictional realm in which magic and elves, and all manner of impossible creatures exist.

Furthermore, Tolkien distinguishes between fantasy and non-rational activities like dreams and nightmares that the conscious mind takes no part in constructing, asserting

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\(^8\) Ibid., 42-43.
that despite its relationship with impossibilities, fantasy is “a rational not an irrational activity.”

Gary Wolfe, critic and Professor of Humanities at Chicago’s Roosevelt University agrees. He explains in *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature*, that when a writer creates a fantasy and the reader reads it an “implied compact [exists] between author and reader—an agreement that whatever impossibilities we encounter will be made significant…[even] as we…recognize [them to be] impossible.” For Wolfe, the author of a fantasy text makes a deliberate choice to include impossible elements. As Tolkien explains, those choices are not based on a flight of whimsy, but because, through the impossible, he or she is able to reveal something true.

Tolkien compares fantasy elements to the contents of a soup that simmers in the imagination of the writer. “There are many things in the Cauldron, but the Cooks do not dip in the ladle quite blindly. Their selection is important.” The choice of the fantasy element, as Tolkien suggests, requires the writer, the “Cook,” to choose fantasy elements deliberately so the story “may be used as a *Mirour de l’Omme.*” Through fantasy, Wolfe and Tolkien suggest, the mirror the author holds in front of humankind transforms the image in order to provide a changed perspective on the world.

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9 Ibid., note 2, 67.


12 Ibid.
Tolkien further defines the fairy-story as “(a) a tale about fairies, or generally a fairy legend;…(b) an unreal or incredible story, and (c) a falsehood….”

Despite Tolkien’s literary pronouncement that fantasy is grounded in the impossible, thousands of critics and commentators would attempt to further clarify and refine his definition. And the pages of refinement continue to flow.

Defining fantasy as a field has challenged the academic and reading community for decades. Discussions include what it is and is not, what topics it may appropriately address, and those it may not, which themes it can effectively explore, and which it should not: its narrative tools, its roots in myth and fairytale; whether it is a genre, a sub-genre, a loose collection of tropes, allegories, or metaphors, and whether or not it is merely an excuse for the author to disregard the rules of materiality. Wolfe comments further, “No one is quite certain whether ‘the fantastic’ describes a group of texts, something that happens in the text (or at what level it happens), or something that happens to the reader encountering the text.” Perhaps, it is all of the above.

Nevertheless, despite literary critics’ difficulty in defining fantasy, some critics consider it to be a natural part of human expression and possibly the source of all other art forms. Tolkien calls fantasy “not a lower, but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent.” For Tolkien, and many Western theorists and critics, it is fantasy as art, its aesthetic power to evoke a response in the reader, that allows fantasy to act as a mirror that transforms truth and affects the reader.

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13 Ibid., 39.


Writer and critic, José Monleón also comments on fantasy’s importance as a form of artistic expression. In *A Specter Is Haunting Europe: A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic*, he writes, “The fantastic is an ingredient of human nature, an empirical phenomenon apprehended without mediation….Fantastic literature…encompasses an aspect of the entire history of artistic production.”\(^{16}\) The fantastic, by virtue of its condition of being “apprehended without mediation,” offers the reader the opportunity to discover personal meaning and truth in the tale. Finally, according to Wolfe, fantasy “could lay a persuasive claim to being the dominant mode of fictional narrative for most of human history.”\(^{17}\) Fantasy, it would seem, then, is one of human beings’ oldest and most diffuse forms of communication. For these reasons, a study of the meanings conveyed through fantasies read by young people merits close scrutiny.

Further defining fantasy, Tolkien requires the fantastical and the story to exist within their own realm, the story *must* not frame itself as a dream, nightmare, or hallucination. Tolkien calls Lewis Carroll’s “Alice stories,” not fairy-stories but “a figment or illusion” because of the “dream-frame and dream-transitions.”\(^{18}\)

Finally, what the story believes to be real must, in fact, be real to the characters in the story. Because the reader must evaluate, accept, and understand what is possible or not within the fantasy narrative (for example, the ability to communicate telepathically, or the existence of elves), the fantasy elements must have clear and specific boundaries about what is possible and what is not within the impossible world. There can be no

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\(^{17}\) Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres*, 34.

In Anderson’s work, the protagonist, Holger Carlsen, is magically transported across time and space to what he comes to believe is an alternate universe. Throughout the story, Holger questions what he is experiencing based on the science of his, and the reader’s, consensus reality. At no time, however, does Holger suggest that what is happening to him and around him is a figment of his imagination, a dream, or an illusion. He and those around him consider the story events to be real, and so the reader and Holger come to “believe” the impossible elements. It is upon this acceptance, this “believing,” that the success of a fantasy story depends. By contrast, in realism, one does not have to “believe” all the components of the story for a realistic novel to be successful.

Elements of Anthony Doerr’s 2015 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, All the Light We Cannot See, exemplify this distinction. Although one of the protagonists of the story, a young blind Parisian girl, believes in the curse surrounding the gem that her father must protect, for the tale to succeed the reader does not need to believe it also. In fact, the success of the tale requires merely for the reader to believe that the girl believes in the curse. The distinction is subtle but important for understanding the difference between fantasy and realism’s approach to the impossible. That the impossible elements of a narrative be accepted as possible within the narrative and not framed as occurring within a dream, a hallucination, or as a figment of a character’s imagination are essential for an
understanding of what fantasy does as a form of art and how it affects those who encounter it as readers.

Literary critic Tzvetan Todorov, in his seminal work *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, suggests that when “the supernatural intervenes,”\(^{19}\) we enter the realm of the marvelous.\(^{20}\) However, that characteristic alone cannot undergird a definition of fantasy. If it did, the genre would include works as vastly different as “Homer, and Shakespeare, Cervantes and Goethe,”\(^{21}\) not to mention the Bible, the Quran, and all religious or mythical texts. He further explains that a reader finds him or herself in the realm of the “fantastic” when events in the narrative “cannot be explained by the laws of nature as they are generally acknowledged.”\(^{22}\) That characteristic alone cannot support a definition either because we would have to include ghost stories or horror stories which adhere to entirely distinct genre expectations from the fantasies I examine.

In order to limit the stories studied, I rely on an element of fantasy that, as Todorov explains, involves the reaction of characters to the fantastical or supernatural elements within the text itself. He writes, “In the case of the marvelous, supernatural elements provoke no particular reaction either in the characters or in the implicit reader.”\(^{23}\) Fantasy requires the characters in the story, and by extension, the reader, to

\(^{19}\) Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 34.

\(^{20}\) Todorov expends much energy on delimiting the differences among the uncanny, the uncanny fantastic, the fantastic marvelous, and the marvelous. For my purposes, his definition of the marvelous matches most closely my definition of fantasy.

\(^{21}\) Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 34.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 54.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
willingly, without hesitation accept that the laws of nature in the book allow magic, the supernatural, or impossible creatures to exist. These elements “provoke” no questions on the part of characters or readers about how magic is possible, how the characters could believe fantastical creatures such as dragons or trolls to be real, or how impossible events can occur.

Professor Emeritus of English literature at the University of Michigan, Eric Rabkin concurs. He suggests that the fantastic is an “affect created by the quick, complete reversal of the assumptions held by the reader at a given moment.”

In other words, when the events in the story require readers to dismiss their knowledge and understanding of how the universe works without a hesitation or pause, the text must be considered fantastic. For Todorov and Rabkin what makes a story fantastic is not what happens in the story but the reader’s response to it. In the moment of reading, the fantasy text expects the characters and the reader to experience no hesitation about how the events in the story should be understood. The supernatural events must be understood as actually occurring within the story. The magic must be understood to be just that, magic. And, as Tolkien explains with respect to Grendel in Beowulf, the “monsters need to be taken seriously as monsters.”

For Todorov how a character within the narrative reacts to the supernatural or a reversal of the reader’s fundamental assumptions of consensus reality is key to determining which texts can be considered fantastic and which uncanny. If the character

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in the story seeks a natural or supernatural explanation for the events, what Todorov terms a “hesitation” about the unnatural element of the story, then the story moves away from being categorized as fantastic toward the uncanny. Nicholas Royle, professor of English at the University of Sussex, considers the uncanny in literature to reflect a character’s uncertainty about what occurs in the narrative. He characterizes the uncanny as a “strangeness,” something that involves the “unexpected,” or anything that turns an “object . . . from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected.” Often the uncanny has a “frightening,” or “spooky” nature, that makes the familiar, unfamiliar.

In stories of the uncanny, both the reader and the characters in a story stop to consider that something “abnormal” has occurred, something that lies outside the norms of materiality as recognized in the narrative world. Such an event, for Tolkien, forces the reader to leave the narrative and at that moment the “spell is broken.” It is this existing inside the spell, within the realm of the magical, and not the unfamiliar or unexpected of the uncanny, that Tolkien and Todorov believe defines the fantastic. When an event “provokes a hesitation…in [either] the reader [or] the hero,” the story has left Tolkien’s

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26 Todorov, The Fantastic, 33 (emphasis added).

27 Nicholas Royle, The Uncanny (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1, 2, & 5. Underlying Royle’s discussion is Freud’s concept of the uncanny which relies on the notion that “what should remain hidden has been revealed,” which figures so prominently in horror and ghost stories. See Brian Clark, “‘At Home in the Uncanny’: Freud’s Account of das Unheimlich in the Context of His Theory of Religious Belief,” Religion 38, no. 3 (May 26, 2008), accessed September 18, 2015, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.religion.2008.04.003.

28 Ibid., 9.


30 Todorov, The Fantastic, 32.
“Perilous Realm” and returned to the reader’s reality. Todorov agrees; such stories cannot be characterized as a fantasy.

Le Guin, Tolkien, and Todorov, all agree that an impossible element must avoid causing the reader to question the narrative’s reality. In order for the text to accomplish this, the fantastical elements in the text must be read literally. The moment the reader no longer believes the magic, the story “has failed.”

For a fantasy to succeed, its unexplainable, unnatural elements must never be questioned nor held up for examination as unnatural within the narrative world. Neither the author nor the characters in the story may offer “rational” explanations for what has occurred, nor offer the reader an alternative way of reading the events. The elements of the “impossible” may not be questioned.

Finally, according to Todorov, the relationship of the narrative to itself must be equivalence. Whereas a realistic narrative exists in a reality that parallels and relies on the consensus reality of the reader, the fantasy exists within its own realm of reality. Todorov explains:

The fantastic has what at…first glance appears to be a tautological function: it permits the description of the fantastic universe, one that has no reality outside language; the description and what is described are not of a different nature.

Because fantasy has no reality outside the narrative, the language that creates the fiction and the fiction itself are one and the same and so negate ties to the world outside the narrative. By linking to the consensus reality, realistic fiction commits to honestly portraying the reality it describes through its language. While the language of realistic

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32 Todorov, The Fantastic, 92.
fiction does not suggest the ontology of the characters or events, realistic fiction must exist in a realm that implies that that is the case. Fantasy, on the other hand, is not bound by these parameters. While both realism and fantasy are equally dependent on language for their existence, fantasy literature exists solely on the level of narrative language. As professor of the history of rhetoric at the University of California at Davis, Lynette Hunter explains, fantasy narratives exist for their own sake, as language in service of the words’ meanings. Todorov, Hunter, and Rosemary Jackson believe it is this existence in a fantasy realm, Tolkien’s Perilous Realm, and its distance from consensus reality that make fantasy such a powerful tool for conveying or commenting on cultural values. Because fantasy requires the reader’s acceptance of the impossible and thus makes him or her complicit in the construction of the fantasy realm by reading the text, fantasy initiates a specific discursive investment in the text which deepens the communication of meaning and cultural outlook conveyed through it.

To further clarify this discursive relationship between fantasy literature and the reader, below I compare fantasy’s relationship with the reader to that of realism’s.

**Fantasy versus Realism**

Realism, referring both to its literary identity and its popular definition used by modern readers, became a preferred subject for critics and readers who rejected the “escapism” and allegorical heavy-handedness of fables and myths. According to Karin Lesnick-Oberstein, director of the Graduate Centre for International Research in

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34 I discuss this further in Chapter 3.
Childhood: Literature, Culture, Media at Reading University in London, realism is:

…that form of writing which attempts to reduce to an absolute minimum our awareness of the language in which a story is written in order that we will take it for real…[sharing] with other theories of language… a conviction that the best form of expression is that which most innocently (“no dishonesty,” “no distortion”) reflects the objects of the real world.35

Lesnick-Oberstein sees realism as focused on the “real world” and does not concern itself with the impossible. Realism must treat the world honestly and straightforwardly. For young readers, realism must not lie.

Realism as a value in art and literature has a long history. Theorists as early as Aristotle comment on the “delight” we take in viewing “the most realistic representations of [objects] in art.”36 For Aristotle, a poet or writer (compared to an historian or political orator) was evaluated based on “the imitative element in his work.”37 For Plato, tragedy, literature’s precursor, involved “essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and of life, of happiness and misery.”38 While of course Aristotle recognized that poets’ works treated more than the actions of human beings, he insisted that the best tragic plots dramatize only incidents that could be considered “probable,”39 in order to arouse pity and fear in the audience.40 Plays like Oedipus Rex, despite the fact that the provoking


37 Ibid., §1451b 25.

38 Ibid., § 1450b 1.

39 Ibid., §1454b 5.

40 Ibid., §1453b 10.
event of the story is a prophecy concerning Oedipus, depend on realism to convey the true tragedy of the characters’ lives.

Realism, born in the 18th and 19th centuries, portrays complex human characters involved in “plausible, everyday modes of experience” in all its “ordinariness.” Henry James would acknowledge, however, in the essay “Art of Fiction” that stories (fiction) are “after all only a ‘make believe’ and a story’s only purpose is to ‘represent life.’” For James, it is an author’s ability to invent recognizable characters and experience that allows him or her to hold a mirror up to reality. Unlike Tolkien’s mirror, however, James’s mirror illuminates the world by reflecting it back without alteration. For James, literature represents life even when it springs from the author’s imagination.

Fantasy author Lloyd Alexander explained the role of reality in literature this way:

All forms of literature...reflect reality, and give us valid insights into it; but even the most convincing depiction of reality only seems to be real....[Reality and fantasy] come from the same source, they share the same goals: to help us discover who we are and what we are....

All literature, realistic or fantastic, according to James and Alexander, offers the reader commentary on life. All literature can be read on multiple levels, uses symbols, dreams, and the products of the subconscious to invite the reader to make a personal interpretation

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of the events within the narrative and reflect on the consensus reality through the insights offered by the text. Realism and fantasy use similar narrative tools to carry out these functions: plot, character development, and mimesis.

As artifacts of the literary arts, both realism and fantasy perform similar functions. They seek “beauty and truth.”\(^4^5\) They focus on a society’s values,\(^4^6\) explore themes essential to a culture’s identity,\(^4^7\) and serve an aesthetic purpose by offering insight into the human experience on an emotional as well as an intellectual level.\(^4^8\)

But Fantasy does something more. Whereas realistic fiction is bound to portray an honest, undistorted picture of the world, Tolkien, for one, believes fairy-stories have an additional capacity to elucidate the mundane by casting our world in a new light. By imagining things that cannot be, fantasy shifts the reader’s perspective on what is. By holding a different sort of mirror to the consensus reality, one that broadens or reconstructs reality, fantasy calls attention to reality’s restrictions.

\[\ldots\] Faerie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky, and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.\(^4^9\)

To Tolkien, fantasy does exactly what realism does, but because it is not bound to represent reality without distortion, or to be an honest portrayal of the world, fantasy offers the reader enchantment. When mortal men and women are enchanted, they begin


\(^{46}\) Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, 4.

\(^{47}\) Ruth Nadelman Lynn, *Fantasy Literature for Children* (Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2005), xvi.

\(^{48}\) Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 115.

\(^{49}\) Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 42 (emphasis added).
to appreciate and understand reality, “the sun, the moon, the sky, and the earth, and all things that are in it,” differently. Faerie requires readers to look closely at reality and see the mundane and the sublime, to expect more than mere bread and wine. Fantasy demands that readers create something new.

While realism can include enchantment, it cannot convey that enchantment without casting it as something else: a dream, a nightmare, or a flight of imagination. It is at the boundary of realism’s commitment to reality that a writer’s responsibility to the reader changes, and, consequently, transforms the reader’s relationship to a work and the world. When the text releases the reader from the confines of his or her “prison” of the consensus reality, he or she finally begins to explore “truer world[s].” As a mode of fiction that has the capacity to evoke “wonder, mystery, or magic,” fantasy takes the reader beyond the truth as defined by society and reveals a deeper truth. Fantasy exercises the reader’s creative imagination and demands that the reader accept something different. “It is a different approach to reality,” as Ursula Le Guin wrote, “an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence.”

A work of realistic fiction is also the product of the author’s imagination. But a work of fantasy requires something of the reader besides the willingness to glean insights into the human condition from the narrative. Fantasy requires the reader to actively participate in constructing the story world, its magic, and the narrative itself. In her work, The Rhetorics of Fantasy, British author and historian Farah Mendlesohn explains that


52 Ursula K. Le Guin, Language of Night, 84.
fantasy demands that the reader co-create the world the writer has envisioned through a “consensual construction of belief.”\textsuperscript{53} Fantastical literature, she explains, “is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader.”\textsuperscript{54} For Mendlesohn, fantasy’s “dialectic” between author and reader, requires an exchange through which they both contribute something to the final product, as in the synthesizing of thesis and antithesis of a Hegelian dialectic. Together they produce something unique. In this way, a fantasy is constructed differently than a work of realistic fiction. The reader, upon choosing a work of fantasy, knows that the text will transgress the possible. He or she can expect the presence of the supernatural, or magical, or marvelous. But still more occurs when a reader chooses a fantasy. In deciding to approach a fantasy text, the writer and reader assume a certain conscious interaction with the text that a reader of realism does not expect. This expectation is what Samuel Taylor Coleridge early termed the “willing suspension of disbelief,”\textsuperscript{55} or more specifically, the reader’s imagination. The reader must leave behind his or her conscious knowledge of the real and step into the unknown. In this way, the reader constructs the fantasy world alongside the writer by contributing his or her own imagination to the final project.

\textsuperscript{53} Farah Mendlesohn, \textit{The Rhetorics of Fantasy} (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), xii.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., xiii.

One example of how co-construction between reader and author works can be found in Poul Anderson’s 1953 work, *Three Hearts and Three Lions.* Throughout the novel, Anderson’s storyteller, an unnamed narrator, using a close third-person point of view, recounts Holger Carlsen’s internal dialogue as he attempts to reconcile science, engineering, and physics with the magic he encounters, including his mysterious transference to a realm outside his World War II-era reality. Anderson anticipates the reader’s objections to the magical and spiritual events and offers reasonable, “scientific” explanations for Holger’s situation. Although, this effort operates in direct contradiction to Tolkien’s admonition against explaining away the magic, because Anderson was a well-known science fiction writer, he knew the audience for whom he wrote. America of the 1950s believed in its own “Manifest Destiny” as a world leader. Daniel Sarewitz, former professor of science and society at Arizona State University, and currently Co-Director of the Consortium for Science, Policy and Outcomes, calls the post-World War II era the Age of Physics because of its faith in science. Holger and his narrator’s acknowledgement that the story is “improbable” helps overcome readers’ rational objections to the world they have entered. However, rather than contradicting Tolkien’s injunction against explaining away the magic, Anderson allows his character and his reader to ponder together the unlikely situation Holger faces as if puzzling through a physics problem, thus inviting the reader to help construct the world of the narrative.

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alongside the author. In this way, readers activate and co-create the Perilous Realm alongside the author as they read.

Although a fantasy text exists in a separate realm from the consensus reality of the reader, according to Todorov and Tolkien it is the reader’s connection to both the fantasy world and the consensus reality that is essential to the success of the narrative. Hunter likens the interaction between reader and text to participation in a game, in which the reader’s knowledge of the real is essential to “the reader’s participating ‘sympathetically in the ground rules of a narrative world.’”

Part of the delight in participating is the knowledge that the space the reader enters requires his or her own imagination for the narrative to succeed. Professor of English at St. Norbert’s College in Wisconsin, John Pennington claims that, “[f]antasy lives because readers activate it and create the fantasy realm.” Without a reader’s imagination as a partner in the creative process, connecting knowledge of the fantasy realm and the consensus reality to the story the author creates, the author’s imaginative exercise remains inert.

Illustrative of this point, once again is Three Hearts and Three Lions. In that novel, the characters and creatures Holger meets or hears about—Morgan Le Fey, Arthur, Charlemagne, and warriors from myth and legend—help Anderson to create connections in the reader’s mind to the myths and legends of his or her own world, subtly drawing parallels that help Anderson build a realistic setting. This technique, common in fantasy

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58 Hunter, Modern Allegory and Fantasy, 69.

novels, draws on the reader’s understanding and knowledge of cultural elements and the way the world works, which is key to weaving a successful setting and aids in the construction of the story’s world.\textsuperscript{60}

At the heart of this dialogue between the reader, the author, the fantasy realm, and the consensus reality lies the main difference between realism and fantasy. It is this dialogue, this dialectic, that makes fantasy such an effective tool for conveying a culture’s attitudes and approaches to the Other and evaluating who or what is evil. The reader must participate in constructing the text for it to succeed on the individual level. The reader brings the social discourses, as Michel Foucault (discussed in the next chapter) would understand them, to his or her construction of the fantasy. Both Hunter and Mendelsohn describe this interplay of writer and reader in terms of the rhetoric of the text, which I address later in this chapter.

**The Realism of Fantasy**

Basic to an understanding of the means by which fantasists construct their works, and convey story, whether deliberately or inadvertently, is an understanding of the fantasy world’s relationship to the real world, and an understanding of fantasy’s purpose. For my discussion of how evil and the Other are portrayed in stories for young readers, fantasy’s rhetoric as a text and how it relates to the audience is key. Numerous critics and theorists have commented on this aspect of fantasy. Tolkien goes to great pains to explain that neither the journey to the Perilous Realm, nor the events within it, should be taken as metaphorical, but rather, must be accepted as “true….\[for they\] cannot tolerate any frame

\textsuperscript{60} For more on Anderson’s works see Chapter 5.
or machinery suggesting that the whole story...is a figment or illusion.”

Rosemary Jackson, Professor in the School of English and American Studies at the University of East Anglia at the time that she wrote her seminal work, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, says:

...The fantastic does not proceed by analog—it is not based upon simile and comparison...but upon equation (this did happen)...[T]he fantastic does not introduce scenes *as if* they were real....: it *insists* upon the actuality of them being real.\(^6^2\)

The text must convince the reader that the impossible within the story is true. Fantasy critic W. R. Irwin suggests that the “reader has a ‘continually renewed awareness that [he or she] is engaged with the impossible as a facetious reality,’”\(^6^3\) one which is deliberately altered, even while the text itself makes every effort to regard the impossible as real. By using as much detail connected to the consensus reality—cultural, sensory, and emotional—the writer draws the reader in to the facetious world in order to make him or her believe what occurs there. Peter Hunt, professor emeritus at Cardiff University in the United Kingdom and the late Millicent Lenz, professor emerita of children’s literature at University of Albany in Canada, write in *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, that fantasy is able to “comment on the real world,”\(^6^4\) by separating from that reality while keeping one eye on it. Writers like Tolkien, Ursula Le Guin, and Christopher Paolini provide illustration of this. The worlds these writers build rely on the reader’s knowledge and experience with the mythical, cultural, physical, and emotional aspects of the


\(^{62}\) Jackson, *Fantasy: Literature of Subversion*, 85 (emphasis added).


material world, which become the building blocks of the fantasy realm. Brian Attebery, professor of English at Idaho State University, and author of numerous critical works on fantasy and science fiction, explains that as the impossible contrasts with the real, the text sheds a different light on what the reader knows, helping him or her “to see our world from a new perspective….Enough continuity from [the real] world to [the fantasy] world [makes] each a usable mirror of the other.”\(^{65}\) Le Guin and other world-building writers use “parallels and contrasts—between the two worlds”\(^{66}\) to create one that is familiar, yet altered. In contrast to the uncanny, fantasy works do not inspire the reader to wonder at the impossible alteration of the familiar but to recognize the familiar in the impossible.

In addition to Tolkien and Le Guin, other writers offer similar comments. In discussing the need for verisimilitude whether writing fantasy or realism, Pulitzer Prize winning author Michael Chabon notes that the author’s “job is exactly the same—to persuade the reader that it’s all true…if you’re writing about suburban New Jersey, as well as suburban Jupiter.”\(^{67}\) To do so writers use all the narrative tools available to them to activate in the reader’s mind the familiar sights, sounds, sensations, tastes, and smells of the consensus world to create a facetious world.\(^{68}\)


\(^{66}\) Ibid.


\(^{68}\) For an interesting discussion of how a narrative accomplishes this see “Readers build vivid mental simulations of narrative situations brain scans suggest,” *Medicine & Health/Psychology and Psychiatry*, 2009.
Essential to the success or failure of a work of fantasy, then, is its ability to draw on the reader’s experience and knowledge of the real world and keep it in front of the reader’s mind, while also expecting him or her to accept the “marvelous,” or the impossible. In doing so, the fantasy gives the writer a rhetorical control that allows the writer to comment on the consensus reality in order to influence the reader’s perspective. Wolfe credits Todorov with drawing attention to this interaction involving reader, author, and text. With this interaction, Wolfe argues, Todorov “invited a kind of rhetorical criticism of fantasy that quickly became a central element in modern discussions of the genre.”

By establishing fantasy’s relevance to the reader’s reality and the author’s ability to comment on it, Todorov elevated the genre out of the academic and critical abyss and made room in the literary discourse for works of the fantastic. Furthermore, Todorov clarified fantasy’s relationship to myth (as one of source material) and distinguished it from the uncanny by demonstrating that the unnatural events in a fantasy story do not alienate or estrange the reader.

Fantasy as Allegory

Fantasy’s link to the real world lies at the heart of what makes fantasy an exceptional tool for manifesting the values of its society. Because it is not confined to “what is generally accepted as possibility,” fantasy requires a specific stance on the part of both the writer and the reader before they approach the work. Perhaps the most explicit

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70 Royle, *The Uncanny*, 4.

71 Hunter, *Modern Allegory and Fantasy*, 68.
explanation for how a story of the supernatural—the impossible—should be read comes from Dante Alighieri’s own commentary on his masterpiece *The Comedy*. In a 14th century letter to his patron, Can Grande della Scala, written centuries before any discussion of the meaning and purpose of fantasy, Dante explained that the work had several levels of meaning. He explained, “The meaning of this work is not simple . . . for we obtain one meaning from the letter of it, and another from that which the letter signifies; and the first is called is called *literal*, but the other *allegorical* or *mystical*.”72 As Dante notes, the poem must be read on multiple levels, and one of them must be literal. By no means is the allegorical to take precedence over the literal meaning. As Dante himself asserts, “The subject of the whole work…taken in the literal sense, is ‘the state of souls after death straightforwardly affirmed,’ for the development of the whole work hinges on and about that.”73 Without the reader’s acceptance of the events within the story as literal, that is the journey from “Dark Wood” to “White Rose,” the story cannot express its higher meaning: “Man—as, by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of his free choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing Justice.”74 The literal passage of Dante the Pilgrim through Hell, his journey up the mountain in Purgatory, and the revelation of souls in the inner circle of Heaven powerfully brings to life the poem’s central message of God’s justice and mercy.

Centuries later, Tolkien echoes Dante in his discussion of how readers must read the “monsters” in the epic poem *Beowulf*. In *Beowulf: Monsters and the Critics*, Tolkien


73 Ibid., 15.

74 Ibid.
rejects critical approaches to the epic that consider Grendel, his mother, or the Fire Drake “radical defect[s]”\textsuperscript{75} of the work. He insists that for Beowulf or any work of fantasy to be successful, the “monsters need to be taken seriously as monsters.”\textsuperscript{76} Furthermore, according to Tolkien, “one thing must not be made fun of, [and that is] the magic itself.”\textsuperscript{77} In other words, as with any literary character or convention, the reader and the critic must approach the text first with the understanding that the author has employed \textit{all} the story’s components with \textit{intentionality}, in accordance with Wolfe’s compact “that whatever impossibilities we encounter will be made significant…”\textsuperscript{78} Because of this, the monsters in \textit{Beowulf} must not be read as stand-ins for something other than themselves. As with the actual journey of Dante’s Pilgrim in his poem, it is a preponderance of physical detail and their connection to historical or cultural elements that give weight and truth to the tale. Unlike the creatures in fables or allegories, the marvelous creatures and characters of fantasy stories, whether dwarves or witches, Orcs or poets, demand to be read as who or what they are. According to Tolkien, an author includes each of these marvelous elements by design, because they contribute specific characteristics to a story, no matter how fantastical or impossible in the consensus reality.

In purely allegorical fiction, on the other hand, such as George Orwell’s \textit{Animal Farm}, or fables such as “The Tortoise and the Hare,” readers recognize the reasons an author chooses to make a point by employing talking animals instead of human beings.


\textsuperscript{76} C. W. Sullivan, “High Fantasy,” 437.

\textsuperscript{77} Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 11.

\textsuperscript{78} Wolfe, \textit{Evaporating Genres}, 70.
Like Dante, Tolkien adamantly rejects the notion that magical creatures in fantasy should be read first or only as allegorical. They behave in a narrative like the creatures they are, and they function in the story as a physical adversary or aid to the hero. Only after performing that function might they be seen allegorically, as Dante explains in his letter to his patron. Only then can they lead a reader to a work’s higher meaning. Because of this higher meaning, fantasy’s rhetorical capacity becomes significant.

The Rhetorical Stance of Fantasy vs. The Rhetorical Stance of Allegory

In *Modern Allegory and Fantasy: Rhetorical Stances of Contemporary Writing*, Lynette Hunter divides theories on writing into theories about fantasy and theories about allegory in order to describe more clearly how these two tools differ with respect to their rhetorical stances. One distinction she makes is based on the way the writer addresses the reader and the attitude with which the writer presents his or her world to the reader. According to Hunter, pure allegory “questions its own truth or falsehood.” Allegory permits an author to comment on how the text should be interpreted or what an image should indicate. Allegory incorporates the confusion it generates “between figural and referential statements…[making] no room for rational logic…[in order] to proffer ‘universal truth of meaning.’” Allegory eschews subtly and offers its own “truth” openly. Hunter suggests that, unlike fantasy, allegory “continually disrupts the reader’s movement in the story.”

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80 Ibid., 147.
81 Ibid., 154-65.
82 Ibid., 160.
creation, allegory’s interrogation of the reader invites awareness of the author’s purpose. Todorov explicitly demarcates a line between allegory and the fantastic, insisting, “[W]e cannot speak of allegory unless we find explicit indications of it within the text.” In allegory the author calls attention to the impossible to make a point, draw attention to an extra-textual meaning, or teach a lesson. While allegory and fantasy both include a specific rhetorical purpose, employ elements of the impossible, comment on “truth,” and require a reader’s interaction with them, from hesitation to construction of the world involved, authors and critics insist that fantasy’s purposes are different than allegory’s and must not be treated as primarily allegorical. Hunter suggests that most fantasy writers believe allegory to be restrictive. Allegory focuses on the author’s purpose for telling a story; fantasy focuses on the story itself. The novels I examine are not considered allegory.

**Fantasy As Metaphor**

Metaphor, on the other hand, bears a very specific purpose and plays a clear role in fantasy, one that authors have employed over the millennia to convey meaning without calling attention to what they are doing. While allegory intentionally draws attention to its symbolic or “analogical” relationship with the material world, metaphor requires readers to seek understanding by linking their personal knowledge of the metaphor’s terms, and building meanings for themselves. While allegory and analogy point toward a specific interpretation, metaphor allows multiple interpretations without being overt, and

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thereby subtly spurs the reader to construct a new meaning beyond the literal one on the page. Metaphor, relying on the strength of the images it uses, binds the primary meaning of both terms to the secondary content. Furthermore, as lecturer at the Divinity Department of Chester College of Education, England, Thomas Fawcett explains in *The Symbolic Language of Religion*: “Symbols do not denote things that are already understood, but attempt to push forward the frontiers of knowledge…. [They] attempt to get beyond the empirical to meaning and value.” The text of a fantasy acts on the reader the way a symbol or the language of poetry connects meanings that aren’t present as words on the page, though they are evoked through literary or real world resonances in the symbols and metaphors employed. For example, in Andre Norton’s *Warlock of the Witch World*, three siblings seek exile in Escore, an unfamiliar land where the magic they wield triggers dangerous responses in both the landscape itself and from other inhabitants of the land. One sibling, Kemoc Tregarth, possesses superior, but untested power. His actions instigate a renewal of an ancient war between those people of Escore who use the Power of the land for survival, and those who would use it for personal aggrandizement.

In this simple example, seen in light of the expansion of American suburbs into the formerly natural environments of forest outside the urban centers at the time Norton was writing, magic becomes a metaphor for the destructive impact of modern technology on the American pastoral landscape and the creatures and people who live there. While Norton may not have inserted this metaphor into her work intentionally, such an

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interpretation of the novel emerges when the reader connects the impact magic has on the environment and people in the novel to the impact technology and suburban expansion had on the untouched landscape of America’s wilderness and the changes it wrought on American society.

Metaphor links the characteristics of two things into one image. Despite the insistence of authors such as Dante or Tolkien that the events or characters in their works be considered real, many critics and literary theorists also insist that it is the metaphorical nature of fantasy that gives it the power to comment on the real world. By calling on the images that the components of a story stimulate in the reader and linking them to the author’s value-laden images, the story conveys new meaning to events in the reader’s world. Key to understanding this, according to Jackson, is a “sliding of one form [or image making] into another, in a metonymical displacement.”[^87] Fantasy “compels a reader into a metaphorical state of mind,”[^88] because, from the first page, the author must build links to the reader’s reality by relying on meanings from the images readily available to the reader in order to construct an imaginary world.

Some examples illustrate this process. In Amelia Atwater-Rhodes’s The Kiesha'ra series that I examine in Chapter 10, two races of shape-shifters have been at war for millennia. While neither side of the bloody feud remembers what the conflict is about, both continue the fight out of obligation to those who have fallen in the war and for revenge. The reader, casting about to understand the conflict can call upon any number of wars in the real world, both ancient and ongoing, to find meaning in the text. In this way

[^87]: Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 82.
the story bridges the distance between the fantastical and the real, without overtly referring to the material world. Similarly, Laini Taylor’s Daughter of Smoke and Bone series, also discussed in Chapter 10, tells the story of Karou, one protagonist in the dual voice narrative who belongs to the race of chimera. Karou falls in love with Akiva, a member of the “angel-race,” and the chimera’s mortal enemies. The narrative’s societies condemnation of the lovers and their subsequent punishment calls to mind a number of extra-textual possible reference points from which the reader understands the danger and risks the lovers’ relationship causes them. Proscriptions against and prejudices concerning inter-racial, gay and lesbian couples, or blood feuds among clan members offer the reader emotional context from which he or she can draw to understand the text’s meaning. Christopher Paolini’s Inheritance series provides one last example. In that story, the main protagonist, Eragon, marvels at how the Elves live in harmony with nature, a conspicuous difference between modern American life and the world of the narrative.

Important emotions resonate through the metaphor because of the reader’s ability to refer to real world experiences. By forcing the three-way dialogue, which includes the reader, the text, and the writer, fantasy is able to comment on the real world without threatening the reader’s own perspective or worldview.

Significantly, using this three-way dialogue, fantasy’s metaphors carry evaluative or ideological components along with them. The texts create sympathy for a point of view or ideology either overtly through character reactions, dialogue or thoughts, or more subtly through tone, image, or theme. Hunter explains that fantasy “‘leaves the terms [of its metaphorical comparison] discrete’ or precise” adding that, “[w]hether or

89 Hunter, Modern Allegory and Fantasy, 63.
not one agrees with the linguistic” meaning of the text, or the opinion the text conveys, “the effect is significant: fantasy writing is not to be left open to much interpretation.”\textsuperscript{90} The way the writer presents the story helps the reader to know what to feel, while simultaneously denying that it so doing so overtly.\textsuperscript{91} As a narrative device, fantasy acts as an extended metaphor that carries with it commentary, criticism, or emotion, and at times all three, which flow from both terms of the metaphorical connection.\textsuperscript{92}

When Paolini’s characters speak of the tragedy of the near extinction of dragons, literally the meaning is nothing more than a statement in the character’s voice of a fact within the text. “On the descriptive level we have the double perspective of the verbal structure and the phenomena to which it is related. Here meaning is ‘literal’ in the common sense…an unambiguous alignment of words and facts.”\textsuperscript{93} But metaphorically it carries a descriptive reference to events outside the text, as well, and by bridging the distance between the two it accomplishes something more than mere description. For the reader, Paolini’s tragic pronouncement about the disappearance of dragons from the fantasy world calls to mind the extinction of species in the reader’s world. With that reference, Paolini’s own perspective concerning extinction follows. In a complex interplay of reader, text, and writer, the fantasy narrative guides the interpretation of the narrative and conveys a writer’s perspective.

Writers and critics agree that it is this subtle use of metaphor that gives fantasy its rhetorical power.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} I discuss this subversive character of fantasy in Chapter 3. 
\textsuperscript{92} Seth Lerer, “Paradise Lost: An Introduction,” The Life and Writings of John Milton (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 1999), Lecture 5.
\textsuperscript{93} Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 123.
Fantasy as Rhetoric

Numerous writers and critics comment on the way that fantasy, as a form of literature, behaves rhetorically. For Wayne Boothe, a former George M. Pullman distinguished service professor emeritus in English language & literature at the University of Chicago, the purpose of any writing is “the desire to say something to somebody, [to make] some human point.”94 Hunter, too, asserts that fantasy specifically “involves rhetoric, belief and value,” worrying with Plato “that written language…[would arbitrarily impose] the opinion of the author”95 on the audience. In addition, she claims “any medium of text” refracts ideology through its stance.96 In other words, writers convey their own opinions through word choice and the emotional content of the story and thereby attempt to sway the reader to agree with a particular perspective.

Fantasy, according to Hunter, is unlike other literature because it is predominantly rhetorical in nature.97 Although Tolkien denies that his work bears “any inner meaning or ‘message,’”98 he recognizes the “applicability” of a tale which he believes “resides in the freedom of the reader.”99 Hunter disagrees, insisting that the writer has “direct and simple control over the reader’s response, which can be exercised toward a genuine alteration of

95 Hunter, Modern Allegory and Fantasy, 184.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 71.
99 Ibid., xv.
the reader’s understanding, but definitely toward a criticism of the existing norms.”

Hunter posits an “active reader,” who unknowingly participates in constructing the rhetorical purpose of the text.

For Hunter, the implied rhetorical end of fantasy is “criticism of the actual world,” but it is done in such a way as to make the criticism appear to be unintentional by the author, thus making it even more artful and subtle. Hunter goes so far as to assert that fantasy “is the embodiment of a value judgment” on the part of the writer. Here is where the interaction of reader and text takes on its most significance. The writer, like the orator presenting an argument for the purpose of persuading an audience, has authority over the information, or the truths, of the text. When the reader, the audience, chooses to interact with the text, he or she, according to Hunter and in direct contradiction to Tolkien, abandons his or her “free will.” The reader, like one of Socrates’s interlocutors, must accept a series of statements in order to forward the story or argument. In this way, the author manipulates the reader into agreement with the story’s purpose. Hunter explains that in fantasy, “it will be easier for the writer to convince [a] reader of [the] ‘truth’ of an opinion because the rules are being specifically set and the reader is less likely to question them.” She asserts that a reader will be more likely to accept the

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100 Hunter, Modern Allegory and Fantasy, 69.
101 Ibid., 69.
102 Ibid., 71.
103 Ibid., 73.
104 Ibid., 67.
105 Ibid., 184.
author’s assumptions, despite, or even though, his or her disagreement with the author’s opinion. Because a text builds meaning over the whole of its length, it will only be by completing the text that the reader will recognize what has occurred. The persuasion “which has been hidden”\textsuperscript{106} within the text itself, lingers with the story in the reader’s mind, and along side it, the author’s opinion or argument.

Because a fantasy requires that the reader accept the text’s truths at the outset, the reader is complicit in the text’s construction. As he or she is led by the writer’s descriptions, tone, and language, and the reader’s acceptance of events or characters he or she knows to be impossible, the text has a powerful effect on the reader. While realism also has a rhetorical purpose, the reader’s acceptance of the “argument” put forward in the text as commentary is one of degree. Because fantasy writers use techniques of rhetorical persuasion to encourage acceptance of the impossible in the minds of their readers, appealing to emotions and wonder, for example, the writer has more frequent opportunity to persuade the reader toward a specific opinion. Again, similar to Socrates’s ability to lead his dialog partners into agreeing to opinions with which they would initially have disagreed, a fantasy writer, by engaging the reader’s imagination in the construction of the text, also captures the reader’s emotional knowledge and so is able to alter opinions and transmit values. As Paolini’s character laments the tragic disappearance of dragons throughout his series, the emotion-laden prose stirs similar lamentation in his readers about the disappearance of other grand beasts from the reader’s world. While the process is entirely subconscious, the fact that the text ostensibly has no

\textsuperscript{106} John Pennington, “Reader Response and Fantasy Literature,” 184.
direct relationship to the reader’s world makes the acceptance by the reader of the opinion of the writer, more likely to slip by unnoticed.

Because its reader has participated in generating the text, fantasy has a powerful affect on the reader.\textsuperscript{107} More than merely being a means of influencing a reader’s opinions though, some critics see fantasy as a means of influencing action, as well. John Pennington suggests that fantasy “can also [seduce the reader] into action—even direct political action.”\textsuperscript{108} While my purpose in investigating this issue is not to condemn, evaluate, or censor authors’ messages themselves, I believe that knowing what the messages about evil are is important for educators and parents.

One final aspect of fantasy makes it an especially potent means of influencing children and young adults: millions of young people read it. Fantasy has proven to be a widely-read and important segment of the literature children and young adults read. In January 2013, fantasy publishing industry blogger, Rose Fox of Publishers’ Weekly, reported that close to 10,000,000 copies of fantasy titles were sold in 2012 alone. The percentage within that total represented by young adult or children’s fantasies was not available from her data, but according to industry analysts, approximately $285 million of the total sales in the juvenile fiction market (books for all children Kindergarten to 12th grade) came from titles “primarily categorized as fantasy.”\textsuperscript{109}

In the next chapter I examine the theories of various social and literary critics about how literature both is influenced by and influences the society and culture from which it springs. Recognizing that fantasy proffers opinions on society through its

\begin{footnotes}
\item[107] Ibid., 185.
\item[108] Ibid., 57.
\item[109] Nadine Vassallo, BSIG Inc., email message to author, July 18, 2013.
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rhetorical nature helps understand the subversive and discursive aspects of fantasy discussed there.

**Conclusion**

Critics and fantasists alike understand fantasy as a literary method that transports the reader into the realm of the impossible. In doing so, it requires the reader to adopt a perspective of openness concerning the materiality and the suspension of disbelief. Because of this, fantasy literature leaves the reader vulnerable to the values and perspectives of the writer. For this reason, fantasy literature offers a lens through which to examine the culture’s messages passed on through stories about war and fantastical and alien beings. By combining mimesis, metaphor, and author perspective, and presenting them to readers disguised as entertaining stories meant to delight, fantasy offers a powerful means by which writers convey cultural values with respect to good, evil, and the Other.
CHAPTER 3

ROSEMARY JACKSON AND MICHEL FOUCAULT: FANTASY AS A LITERATURE OF SUBVERSION

The insight that culture is closely linked with power is important….One of the leading themes in the literature on Postmodernism is the claim that culture is used to legitimate political authority; Foucault is a prominent advocate of this view. ¹

~Ronald Inglehart

In the previous chapter I discuss how fantasy literature requires a reader to be open to the author’s assertion of the impossible in the text, enabling the author to convey his or her own opinions about the consensus reality into which the book is published. Among the perceptions and cultural messages conveyed to the reader through fantasy are those that concern evil and the Other. By presenting these perceptions to readers disguised as narratives that rely on mimesis and metaphor, authors are able to persuade the reader to adopt the writer’s position about who or what is evil and how to approach it. In this chapter I discuss how, using the critical approach of Rosemary Jackson, former professor in the School of English and American Studies at the University of East Anglia, and critic and writer, Michel Foucault, works of fantasy can be understood as nodes of meaning in a complex web of interlaced and interconnected meanings which reflect, while also subverting and exchanging ideas about existing structures in a society. ²


² While a society can contain numerous cultures within it, and, similarly, culture can span different societies, I will use these terms interchangeably. For my purposes, both the influences and interchanges between all components within a society, and the numerous cultures that contribute to it as a unit, are of interest.
Foucault’s concept of discourse analysis makes it possible to examine the network of relationships that make up and govern a society. According to Foucault, these relationships, these “fundamental codes,” govern the way people within a specific society think, behave, and speak. They frame the way a member of a society participates in culture itself. These codes determine, as Foucault describes:

...[a culture’s] language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices...[and]...establish for every [man or woman] from the very first, the empirical orders with which [he or she] will be dealing and with which [he or she] will be at home.”

Foucault states that a network of relationships permeates every thread of a culture’s fabric. For him, understanding a society’s connections, even the most marginal of relationships, is essential to understanding a culture.

In fantasy literature, protagonists or heroes often confront an evil force or Other that threatens his or her society. In my examination of the fantasy literature in later chapters, I examine the “system of relations,” that “ordered” American society at the time of the work’s production, with a focus on the relationships between the United States and its enemies. Often these enemies are manifested in the works for young adult as an evil antagonist. Using Foucault’s methodology, I examine the works of imagination themselves, including the writer’s social, economic, and political environment, and the socio-political milieu, at home and abroad, within which texts were published and in which readers read them. In this way, I seek to understand the influences, institutions, and contingent historical events that come to bear on the fantasy literature as cultural nodes of

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4 Ibid., 55.
meaning, as Foucault understands that concept. By analyzing the complex matrix of a combination of government, cultural, social, familial, and youth discourses that contribute to that production, it is possible to grasp how a society defines good and evil and its perception of the Other based on the way protagonists confront the enemy in the fantasy work.

Generations of critics and readers have recognized fantasy’s unique ability to offer commentary on a culture’s ideology and values. G. K. Chesterton wrote of “the duplicity and ambivalence of fantasy in its attempt to remain separate from the world at the same time as deriving from it and commenting upon it.”5 In Magic Abjured: Closure in Children's Fantasy Fiction, Lecturer in English Literature at Haifa University, Israel, Sarah Gilead responds to the critical neglect of fantasy because it is seen as an escapist mode of literature. She writes that, despite its reputation for being escapist, fantasy, “as reality’s counterrealm, [is]…a tool for confronting rather than evading reality.”6

Furthermore, Jackson suggests that, far from being an escapist form of literary experience separate from the everyday world of its readers, in fantasy, “the actual world is constantly present… by negation.”7 Fantasy literature, like other forms of art and literature, offers insights into a culture’s perceptions of itself and those it considers the Other. Fantasy literature, because of its separation from the “real” and its focus on the tension between good and evil, opens space for a critical look at behaviors a culture

5 Lynette Hunter, Modern Allegory and Fantasy: Rhetorical Stances of Contemporary Writing (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 54.
proscribes, the members it marginalizes, and the means it will go to in order to preserve the status quo.

Rosemary Jackson and Fantasy’s Subversive Function

According to Jackson, just as dreams function as a release valve for repressed desires in the human psyche, fantastic literature plays a similar function in a society: it serves to preserve the status quo by allowing readers to safely explore ideas, feelings, and behaviors that are forbidden by societal norms. Fantasy performs a more subversive function as well, according to Jackson, because it provides insight into alternative viewpoints or beliefs that might not be part of the cultural mainstream. By exploring nonconformist modes of being in the society and exposing how a system of values affects a society, fantasy openly questions previously monolithic or sacrosanct norms or beliefs. When fantasy worlds expose readers to characters or situations with divergent definitions of “normal,” diverse real-world choices begin to take shape in the reader’s imagination.

Fantasy narratives, Jackson explains, express “unconscious drives…and frequently show in graphic form a tension between the ‘laws of human society’ and the resistance of the unconscious mind to those laws.” She notes that fantasy literature serves as a culture’s memory of what has been repressed and shunned. Similarly, Michel Foucault’s analytical method of discourse analysis provides tools for examining how “discursive events,” such as literary texts, express the socio-political moment. Such events, or texts, reveal how that moment frames and is framed, and acts on and is acted

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8 Ibid., 155.
9 Ibid., 6.
10 Ibid., 96.
upon by other discursive events such as power relationships, definitions of right behavior, and who may be included in the society’s image of itself.

Furthermore, one example of how fantasy accomplishes its role as a society’s memory and release valve, and becomes a manifestation of the discursive exchange between text and society is found in Andre Norton’s Witch World series. Published in the 1960s, an era that discouraged female independence and promoted their dependence on male family members, a cult of women with political and magical power under siege, like the one portrayed in Norton’s work, exemplifies the underlying suspicion of women’s power during that time period in U.S. history. In the series, the Wise Women of Estcarp struggle to maintain their power in a world in which technology, male sexuality, and military prowess are used against the women. As the society and individuals in the novels struggle against threats to their power, Norton’s text probes the 1960’s “domestication” of women and suppression of their power, while questioning the growing pervasiveness of new technology and male dominance of the greater world. This subverts America’s celebration of the docile female homemaker and the male dominated science-driven culture of 1950s and 1960s. It is in the tension between the allowed (limiting female power to the domestic sphere) and the proscribed (confining them to that sphere as dependents of their husbands) that makes Norton’s novel reflective of the conditions of society and subversive to those conditions.

In this way, the conventions of fantasy literature, such as depicting the battle between good and evil, and the construction of alternative worlds, interrogate “the basis
upon which cultural order rests…”\textsuperscript{11} It opens “up for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems.”\textsuperscript{12} It offers a glimpse into something different. Fantasy both portrays a culture’s values and restrictions, and explores what is lost when one conforms to them.

Jackson explains further:

The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’ [\textit{sic.}]. The…fantastic narrative…tells of the impossible attempt to realize desire, to make visible the invisible and to discover absence. Telling implies using the language of the dominant order and so accepting its norms, [while also] recovering its dark areas. Since this excursion into disorder can only begin from a base within the dominant cultural order, literary fantasy is a telling index of the limits of that order. Its introduction of the 'unreal' [\textit{sic.}] is set against the category of the 'real' [\textit{sic.}]–a category which the fantastic interrogates [through] difference.\textsuperscript{13}

By transforming those whom a culture despises into enemies for its heroes to battle, or revealing those who are absent in the mainstream, fantasy makes visible the marginalized and dehumanized. Because, Jackson says, “Any social structure tends to exclude as ‘evil’ anything radically different…. [Evil] is a concept at one with the category of otherness itself.”\textsuperscript{14} For Jackson, Otherness is one of society’s clearest signals that something is evil. Fantasy literature portrays the marginalized as the evil Other, as well as offering clues about what a society defines as good and evil. Furthermore, how the hero confronts the Other shows the limits of society’s tolerance of the challenge to its power and values represented by the Other.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{12} Hunter, \textit{Modern Allegory and Fantasy}, 4.

\textsuperscript{13} Jackson, \textit{Fantasy: Literature of Subversion}, 4.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 30-31.
Poul Anderson’s 1954 work, *The Broken Sword* (discussed in Chapter 5), provides an example of this exploration of the extremes to which a society will go to preserve the status quo. In Anderson’s work, the elf prince Skafloc stubbornly disregards all warnings that the sword *Tryfing* he seeks to have re-forged will be his undoing. Skafloc sees his rival, Valgard, as a fundamental threat to himself and his people. By resorting to the “ultimate” weapon, as Americans did in 1945 against Japan, Skafloc’s willingness to unleash the most dangerous weapon his society possesses reveals how far he is capable of going in order to preserve himself and his society. Exploring the dangers of such weapons on the society itself, Anderson undermines the American belief that nuclear weapons were a practical solution to dealing with its enemies, which is demonstrated by the growing American nuclear arsenal of the era. Anderson’s fantasy casts a light on a society’s beliefs and values and begins to subvert the logic, or lack of it, in a society’s conduct of war.

Finally, by drawing attention to the marginalized, the powerless, or the shunned in a society, fantasy has the power to reveal such groups’ absence in the society of consensus reality. In Anderson’s other work also discussed in Chapter 5, *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, the hero Holger Carlsen befriends a wood elf named Hugi. He discusses with this lowly servant the intricacies of democracy and the nature of political status as a way of explaining the differences between Holger’s world and the alternate universe he enters. Along the way, Holger meets other elves who are all but invisible to the fairies of this new world. By naming and personifying a member of a race who is beneath the notice of both the good and evil powers in the fantasy society, Anderson reveals how contemporary American society dehumanized and made invisible those outside the white
cultural mainstream. He casts a spotlight on Hugi’s role in the society and in doing so makes visible those who are invisible in the consensus reality and calls attention to the inequality and injustice of the reader’s world.

By making visible the invisible, by revealing and uncovering absence, by depicting power’s uses and abuses, fantasy uses the language and the norms of the dominant order to challenge and interrogate that order. It subverts the reader’s material order by forcing him or her to take note of the incongruities between what is seen and what isn’t; what is accepted and what is rejected. It calls into question the dominant cultural perspective on otherness, power, and justice and offers alternatives for comparison.

Amelia Atwater-Rhodes’ Kiesha'ra series offers an additional example of how this kind of subversion takes place. In the first two volumes of the series, *Hawksong* and *Snakecharm*, both nations involved in the war between the avian and serpentine shape-shifters see extermination of the other society as their goal. Atwater-Rhodes brings into sharp focus the futility of this perspective by portraying the war from both sides, first from the point of view of the heir to the avian throne, and then from that of the serpiente prince. By allowing the reader to see the war from both perspectives and to understand its effects on the people themselves, as well as on their cultures, the reader is forced to confront the contradictions found in the rhetoric justifying the war within the novels. Atwater-Rhodes is able to comment on the nature of war in general, and on “real” wars, without bringing the politics of her own society into the discussion. By allowing the reader to experience intimately the point of view of both societies, she requires that the reader internalize the Other’s perspective, thereby subverting the war rhetoric of her own
culture, that of the post-9/11 war on terror, which echoes through the reader’s mind as he or she reads the story. Glimpses into alternative understandings of the world, such as those Anderson and Atwater-Rhodes offer open for the reader the chance to experience divergent points of view and avenues for change.

By doing so, fantasy instantiates and undermines the complex web of meanings upon which a culture rests. Fantasy’s plots, themes, and characters embody cultural fears, hopes, expectations, and beliefs. By dramatizing the battle between good and evil, fantasies make concrete a culture’s norms of behavior and its historical and cultural contingencies concerning the way its members conceive of Otherness.

The methodology of Michel Foucault contributes important insight into how fantasy can be used to understand and explore the moral and ethical “legalities” of a society. I turn now to Foucault and discourse analysis.

Society’s and Fantasy’s Origins

Michel Foucault’s discourse analysis has been instrumental in shaping our understanding of how a culture’s values can be examined through a work of art. He explains that, by examining the elements that make up “discourses” themselves, we can uncover the rules that define and order objects. Foucault focuses on the “historical forms that, with all their constraints and their diversity, make us what we are.” For

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Foucault, it is a culture’s grounding in historical conditions of our existence that infuse meaning to every contingency of our lives.

In The Archaeology of Knowledge Foucault refines his previously more historical methodology, and abandons the idea that discourse is a “phenomenon of expression—the verbal translation of a previously established synthesis,” and instead he conceives of discourse as the “totality…[of] a network of distinct sites” of meaning. These sites regulate and govern the discursive objects and their dispersion. In other words, no artifact or event in a culture can be understood in isolation. All objects or discursive events must be examined in relation to all others, with respect to how they reveal the relationships that exist in a society. Following Nietzsche’s “genealogical” method, Foucault seeks to explore the “web of entangled events, whose chance combination has yielded a contingent configuration of production, display, reception, and discourse.”

Rather than a synthesis of thesis and antithesis, Foucault see discourse as a continuous play of combining, disassembling, and recombining that occurs in the process of ordering a society’s meanings. Rather than being a progression of necessary historical syntheses along a Hegelian dialectic, Foucault sees all texts, or discourses, as nodes of meaning connected and connecting to other discourses in a contingent, that is, existing, order. It is in uncovering this ongoing “ordering” or combining that we can understand


18 Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, 55 (emphasis added).

19 Ibid., 48.

20 Tanke, Foucault’s Philosophy of Art, 6 (emphasis added).
and examine the “practices that systematically form the objects”21 which interest me, namely works of fantasy literature.

One Approach To the Production of Works of Art

Foucault’s concept of the analysis of discourse requires a specific approach to the contingent historical context in which a work of art is produced. According to Foucault, “discourses are composed of signs, but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to language and speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe.”22 Foucault’s method allows us to see a fantasy text not merely as a manifestation of the writer’s imagination or the manifestation of a culture’s collective value system. His understanding of discursive formation opens up an entire web of intersecting conditions, values, events, understandings, power relationships, and more, to an analysis of how discursive events produce the writer, the reader, and the fantasy itself.

Foucault attempted this method in examining the fantastic literature of the Middle Ages. Foucault explains that fantastic literary conventions such as talking animals were intelligible to the people of the Middle Ages because, he writes:

. . . [The talking animals and the people who heard the stories] exist[ed] in the ecosystem of legends and fables; they inhabit[ed] the graphic space of fantastic literature. Not only does such literature say something about the period under consideration, but it re-presents it as well, and not just on the surface, as a mirror, but also in depth; within the intimate corners of its psyche.23

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22 Ibid. (emphasis added).

Similarly, according to Lynette Hunter, the writer and reader of a fantasy does not merely reproduce what he or she experiences in the world, as talking animals and fantastical creatures don’t exist, after all. A work of art springs from the artist and his or her society’s processing together, through mutual interaction and participation in the world, Foucault’s matrices of influence. Through an “epiphany” the artist becomes the society’s instrument to make something visible or manifest. Because the visible artifact—a play, a building, or a scientific discovery—reveals a new reality for the artist, the society, and the artifact’s context, it also reveals deeper meaning in the matrix. By means of the “something” new, all other things take on new meaning. But even more important than this new meaning is the fact that the old meaning has exerted and influenced all possible new meanings upon which they are built. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault explains that science changed the meaning of madness by redefining what constituted evidence of madness based on the tools medicine had available with which to diagnose it. In a similar way, the artist or writer applies the culture’s mode of seeing the world and becomes an instrument to make visible the society’s values.²⁴ What the artist experiences, the real, is transformed into the unreal. He or she re-imagines and reinterprets an image of the society. In this way, as Brian Attebury explains, fantasy provides, “not an escape from, but…a means of re-imagining, of re-seeing the world we live in.”²⁵ Through that re-imagining, the underlying assumptions of the real are exposed.

Foucault’s method, like the literary criticism of New Historicism, seeks to locate a text in its historical moment. By searching for the cultural and historical conditions that


²⁵ Attebery, “Beginning Place,” 123.
existed when a work was produced, a critic can better understand the work’s full meaning.26 But Foucault’s genealogy goes beyond the analysis of a work’s historical context. In addition to addressing these external and contingent conditions, Foucault seeks to understand something more fundamental. His notion of discourse analysis allows the analyst to “ontologize categorizations,”27 to bring into being, through the tools of language the way a society understands the world, and thus integrate the way historical categories shape and construct, and are shaped and constructed by the contingencies of the society or culture. Again, in redefining the way society understood madness, science re-visualized the treatment of it. In a similar way, as fantasy authors responded to modernism’s relativism concerning good and evil (discussed in Chapter 4), evil in the fantasies produced no longer manifests itself as a force of nature (as in Poul Anderson’s Three Hearts and Three Lions) but as a result of human choice, (as in Lloyd Alexander’s Prydain Chronicles, or Ursula Le Guin’s Earthsea Cycle).

For Foucault, the exchange between a node of meaning and its cultural manifestation is a two-way street. We build context as it influences us at the same time as we influence the social context. We are shaped by, and we shape the discourses in which we are immersed. This allows us to engage in and reveal cultural meanings,28 but these meanings remain neutral rather than predetermined, deterministic, or absolute. They


28 Ibid.
merely are. This neutral positioning makes Foucault’s method helpful in addressing the question of what values a work of literature expresses for young audiences. It reveals what the values are while assuming a neutral stance toward them.

Despite the fact that fantasy literature has often been seen as a tool for the preservation of a society’s existing cultural norms, Foucault’s method reveals how fantasy acts as “an anti-cultural force, one that harbor[s] the capacity to oppose unwarranted consensus, question habits, and post new values,” and, thus, brings about change. In the fantasy novels I examine later in this thesis, fantasy elements perform both functions; they preserve and call for change of the status quo.

Below I examine Foucault’s methodology more carefully in order to describe the process by which artistic creation occurs within the social and cultural discourses found at any one moment in time.

Foucault’s Discourse Analysis

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault refines and elaborates his concept of discourse analysis. In that work and others, he uses his methodology to understand the interaction between the medical professions and madness specifically. However, because Foucault seeks to reveal the interrelatedness/interconnectedness of discourses in a social environment, his methodology has proven particularly useful to understanding literature.

Foucault’s discourse analysis examines “points of view, contents [of texts of all sorts], the forms, and even the style of description, the use of inductive or probabilistic

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30 Tanke, *Foucault’s Philosophy of Art*, 4.
reasoning, types of attribution of causality, in short… the modalities of enunciation…”31 Foucault sees discourse as the site from which a writer writes, readers read, and society observes, describes, and teaches. Literature—fantasy—exists within a web of elements “that is not ‘really’ given or constituted a priori,”32 but embodies a unity, a totality. He explains, “The modalities of enunciation that [a discourse] uses, or to which it gives place are not simply juxtaposed by a series of historical contingencies, it…makes constant use of [groups] of relations.”33 Examining these groups of relations reveals who the society defines as Other and represses, or against whom a society wages war. It does so by highlighting social proscriptions on behavior or revealing those who are invisible (i.e. pressuring women out of the workforce in the 1950s or the closeting of gays and lesbians).34 We can analyze the body of young adult fantasy literature as both a discourse within its own time and context, but also a discourse with the longer historical context of fantasy literature, and the larger cultural/social environment, as well.

Foucault’s analysis begins at the level of statements. Statements in Foucault’s discourse analysis must be understood as all possible elements within a complex web of interrelated conditions or nodes of meaning and significance. He searches deeply into the social context, so that statements uncover meanings, both overt and subtle, and specialized and general. Foucault searches for connections between discursive objects, and finds meaning in the relationships that exist between and among them. Using

31 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 53.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

Foucault’s analysis, it is possible to understand 1950s and 60s society’s unbalanced relationship between men and women as it is manifested in the portrayal of witches in Andre Norton’s Witch World series. In Norton’s novels, only virgins have magical power. Rape is used as a weapon to neutralize women’s power. In a society biased toward male power and sexuality, and in which monogamous, male-dominated family-centered suburban households were idealized, female power was suspect, especially female power un-checked by male members of a society.

Literature, for Foucault, represents one of the most isolatable discourses in a society. Acting on multiple levels, beyond the surface meaning of words and sentences, texts interact with other aspects of the society. Employing Foucault’s method to examine fantasy literature and society, with a specific focus on the society’s relationship to the Other, allows us to construct an analysis of all statements in a complex web in which no statement is “free, neutral, [or] independent” but always plays a part in a network of statements, “in which it has a role, however minimal it may be, to play.”

Foucault states it this way:

…There is no statement that does not presuppose others; there is no statement that is not surrounded by a field of coexistence, effects of series and succession, a distribution of functions and roles. If one can speak of a statement, it is because a sentence (a proposition) figures at a definite point, with a specific position, in an enunciative network that extends beyond it.

In other words, no statement can be examined in isolation. No action related to the statement is neutral, in which case, the very objects of my study themselves, and my

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35 Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, 99.

36 Ibid.
decision to study them, comprise statements that offer insight into the society of which my artifacts and I are a part.

Foucault sees every possible enunciation or statement as a complex interlocked, coexisting system of statements that depends on one another to allow or exclude other statements, condition the way of understanding an object (or statement, i.e. a work of literature), and shape the context that makes it meaningful. The meaning emanates from the relations “between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization” and “enable it to appear.” In addition, these relations determine what can be written about, spoken about, analyzed, classified, or explained. Foucault’s method does not function at the level of concepts, the “stone-by-stone construction of an edifice” of a society’s conditions, but rather at the level of the statements themselves and how they appear, circulate, and interrelate. Foucault wanted to examine the very network of social meaning itself. He sought to understand the “Order” of a society: the “Why” and “How” of what is said, written, produced, understood; rather than the “What.” Furthermore, Foucault’s method allows an examination of what is not said, as much as what is said. His method undergirds the critical literacy approach to teaching and understanding a text, which exposes the values, concerns, and subtle prejudices underlying a culture’s belief system and its approach to the Other, in order for those prejudices and beliefs to be revealed, analyzed, and understood.

37 Ibid., 45.
38 Ibid., 56.
39 Ibid., 34, 45-46, 56, 98, 103.
Finally, Michel Foucault’s understanding of “transgressive writing” applies particularly well to fantasy literature specifically. Foucault believed that certain works “opened a space for action, experimentation, chance, freedom, mobility.”\textsuperscript{40} It is in writing that Foucault believed a “subject” could drag [his or her] voice out of the reach of the authorities and…create one’s own lifestyle.”\textsuperscript{41} The transgressive nature of writing, similar to Jackson’s understanding of the subversive character of fantasy, dissolves cultural limits and opens space to allow readers to see the world, and their society, differently. Writing, especially fantasy writing, “takes limit to the edge of its being, to the point where it virtually disappears.”\textsuperscript{42} It is this liberation from limits that brought Foucault to see art as a cultural expression that “marks the border between the sayable and the unsayable,”\textsuperscript{43} and to recognize fantastical art as the place were a society tests the borders between good and evil, between those who society includes and those who it excludes. As John Marx explains, fantasy “widen[s] gaps, open[s] up space for deviations, [modifies] the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations and recognize their images.”\textsuperscript{44} Foucault’s genealogical method attempts to understand what a work of art does, “as it carves out its place within a historical …tapestry.”\textsuperscript{45} For Foucault, a work of art, such as fantasy

\textsuperscript{40} Simon During, Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{42} Jackson, Fantasy, The Literature of Subversion, 79.

\textsuperscript{43} Johana Oksala, Foucault on Freedom (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 168.

literature, is an “event” that is a “dynamic, active, and in some instances, an aggressive being. It is…thoroughly conditioned by its historical place, and the means by which history is made and transformed.”

It is in this transformative function that art and literature become a form of “truth-speaking,” endowed with an ethical component. Speaking truth to a society necessarily indicates a path to “right action.” Applying Foucault’s analysis to a work of fantasy reveals not merely the work’s meaning so much as its significance in the cultural understanding of ethical behavior and power, and in doing so helps us identify the culture’s approach to evil or the Other.

For Foucault, the “mental universe” that he seeks to understand and elucidate is not that of an individual or an oeuvre, but of a society. It is a social analysis. “The motifs that he fastens upon belong less to private creative or readerly imaginations than to history.” Foucault sees the discourse that is fantasy literature as the result not of a “genius” or a diachronic progression from one stage to another, but rather as the result of a convergence of contingent events in time.

Fantasy “takes a slice of the present, isolates and amplifies it,” Hunter explains, and presents it to the reader, free of any overt or established connection to the real. Its power rests on its ability to reveal truths about a society, hiding commentary in plain sight, and thereby allowing the writer to evade censorship or criticism. Finally, as

45 Tanke, *Foucault's Philosophy of Art*, 7.

46 Ibid., 8.

47 Ibid., 12.

48 During, *Foucault and Literature*, 73.

Todorov explains, a fantasy’s “use of the supernatural or the impossible functions to exempt the text from the action of the law and thereby to transgress the law.”

It is fantasy’s transgressive capacity that opens “new perspectives on the reader’s experiential world” and allows the knowledge instantiated in the work itself to be known and expressed. Gary Wolfe, literary critic and Professor of Humanities at Chicago’s Roosevelt University goes as far as to call the fantastic a mode of human knowing, offering a new perspective on reality and a “renewed awareness of what we already know.” Rather than merely expressing something known, fantasy offers new understanding by looking in a new way, at the already known. It provides a means to do so safely, without fear of violating a society’s norms or transgressing its power relationships, because these messages are presented as “make believe” or part of a game.

Because Foucault sought to describe the system of organization, formation, and circulation of statements in a society and how that system ordered knowledge, a genealogical analysis of a body of literature reveals how a work functions as an element of the social knowledge. A genealogical approach shows how literature contributes to the formation of meaning in a culture. As Associate Professor of Philosophy, Aesthetics, Historical Ontology, and Social and Political Philosophy at the University of Hawaii,

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52 Ibid.

Joseph Tanke explains:

[A] genealogy must break apart the conceptual, linguistic, and visual sedimentations that assume ‘self-evident’ status… and restore to thinking the field of forces, events and contingencies from which our being has been abstracted….It seeks to immerse us in the field of historical contingencies that have fashioned us, to in turn make it possible to think and see otherwise.  

For Foucault, a genealogical approach shifts the focus onto the underlying grounds of our being and, by doing so, hints at other possibilities. Fantasy becomes a literature of subversion, and transgresses the very body of knowledge and meaning it instantiates and contributes Foucault’s “more” to the analysis.

Finally, a genealogy attempts to determine how statements “reappear, dissociate, recompose, gain in extension or determination, [are] taken up into new logical structures, acquire…new semantic contents, and constitute partial organizations among themselves.” The genealogical method seeks to understand more than just a chain of events or development of a specific way of thinking. It seeks to disentangle “separate strands of meaning that have come together in a (contingent) unity in the present.” In addition, because Foucault saw discourse as more than applicable to language theory or philosophy, it is possible to apply Foucault’s method to both a “collective” and a “super-individual” experience of the world. A work of fantasy reflects not only the writer as a node in the fantasy’s matrix of meanings, it represents every individual who participated in its construction, every reader and book seller, as well everything that influenced each of them, and so on to the extreme extension of the web of society. Nothing for Foucault,

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54 Tanke, *Foucault’s Philosophy of Art*, 5.

55 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 60.

not even the silent reader alone, can be seen in isolation. Everything must be understood as connected.

The benefit of using Foucault’s method to analyze fantasy literature lies in that it extends the analysis beyond the reader and the writer to include every part of the culture that directly or indirectly had an impact on the content of the discursive statement, the fantasy novel. Such an analysis includes the interpretation, commentary, and overt or imagined literary, societal, or historical allusions within the work. It allows us to recognize in the horrific creatures portrayed in a fantasy novel, the monsters of Jeffrey Cohen’s “Monster Culture.” More importantly, a genealogical approach allows us to delve into the ethical discourse of which the novel is a part. As Foucault himself explains, he was interested in understanding an era as an “attitude...a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging.” Inherent in notions of “belonging,” we find its opposite, the notion of the Other.

 Fantasy exists “between the already ‘encoded’ eye and reflexive knowledge” of the reader and the writer. This “middle region” or “order” is “the most fundamental” of all modes of being. It is “anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures...” and so, exists in

57 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 60.
“every culture, between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and [the] reflections upon order itself.”

Foucault’s method, therefore, allows not only an examination of a culture’s artistic production but its mode of being, as well.

In the following chapter, I turn to a discussion of Western society’s notions of right and wrong, good and evil, freedom, justice, and the manifestations of evil as philosophers, theologians, and thinkers enumerated them. Through them I gather the meanings about evil and the Other exchanged in the complex discourse of ethics and culture that influence the writers, readers, and characters of fantasy literature.

**Conclusions**

Rosemary Jackson’s concept of subversion and Michel Foucault genealogical exploration of literature provide tools to expose the cultural and historical matrices of meaning that manifest themselves is works of fantasy. In addition, Foucault’s approach sees in history markers of discontinuity or interruption in the succession of ideas and social meaning, and allows an analytic comparison from moment to moment to pinpoint a shift in those meanings. By examining different fantasy novels over a period of 60 years, I demonstrate a change in the way writers for young adults portray evil, and so reshape their readers’ understanding of the Other, ethics, and what it means to be a part of a society. Furthermore, through the confrontations in the novels, fantasy writers show a change in the way society approaches the Other and so manifest a changed in the dialogue concerning community, the enemy, and war.

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61 Ibid.
Finally, because Foucault rejected the notion of a pre-given human nature and saw ethics as part of the contingent complex collection of rules and relations between individuals, society, and the self,\textsuperscript{62} Foucault furthers the postmodern cause of finding meaning in a multicultural and diverse society. His method allows us to find nodes of meaning in a complex society that no longer can point to one single understanding of who we are as a society.

In the next chapter, I examine various Western approaches to ethics in order to address the postmodern conundrum of finding common ground among opposing ideas about right and wrong, and good and evil.

\textsuperscript{62} Rabinow, “Introduction,” xxxiv.
CHAPTER 4

DEFINING EVIL: ETHICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO GOOD AND EVIL IN WESTERN THOUGHT

. . . It was on the moral side, and in my own person that I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness…if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both….

~Robert Louis Stevenson The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

In this chapter I turn to a discussion of the long history of Western attempts at defining good and evil, following on Rosemary Jackson’s assertion that evil becomes attached to a cultures’ fears and values, and how a society begins to interconnect meaning about Otherness with the origins of evil. ¹ An examination of young adult fantasy writers’ works reveals that, like Western philosophers and theologians, Western literature explores themes of good versus evil, how each is manifested in the world, and how we approach those we perceive to be in its thrall or those who do not align with what a culture perceives to be consensus behavior. An examination of the American historical, political, and social context offers insight into how Americans have demonized our enemies and, by doing so, justify our confrontation with and treatment of them through marginalization, repression, or war. In later chapters I turn to an examination of the stories, characters, and contexts created by writers for young adults that consciously or unconsciously dramatize an understanding of evil that permeated American society at different times in the last 65 years. Their creations breathe life into the debate over war,

freedom, and ethical behavior in a society of diverse cultural and philosophical origins. By examining the thinking that underlies Western concepts of good and evil, we are able to recognize fantasy literature’s dramatization of these ideas. Ideas about right and wrong as portrayed in these fantasies offer insights into what Americans see as justifiable responses to those whose actions we classify as evil and therefore constitute a threat to our society as a whole.

Because I am working with literature written by American writers for a primarily Western audience, I focus on Western ethics as expressed by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. These thinkers have fundamentally shaped American notions of who and what is evil and how we as a society must deal with it.

**Plato and Aristotle**

Fundamental to any understanding of a Western notion of the good is Plato’s concept of the Forms. For Plato, human beings are able to understand good and evil because of our previous experience of the Ideal forms in the life our “souls” lived prior to our existence on earth.² Plato’s positing of the soul gives rise to his image in *The Phaedrus* of the charioteer driving a pair of winged horses, one noble and the other ignoble.³ With this image Plato suggests that both good and evil drives exist in all of us,

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and the key to our happiness and the health of our society is our ability to control them. Plato, writing in the voice of Socrates, believes that by using reason as a guide a human being could control these drives.

In *The Wizard of Earthsea*, the first volume of her young adult fantasy series, the Earthsea Cycle, Ursula Le Guin dramatizes Plato’s notion of an internal battle raging between the good and evil drives within every soul. In this novel specifically, and throughout the series, Le Guin’s protagonist, the wizard Ged, personifies the need for human beings to control both sides of our character. Achieving balance between the noble and ignoble forces that constitute Ged’s identity becomes essential to his survival. Le Guin uses the imagery of equilibrium between light and dark and black and white to drive home this notion of the duality in the human soul.

Over and over, Le Guin’s characters warn Ged of the need to respect the “Equilibrium” in the world and to recognize one’s limited understanding of the delicate balance between opposites of life in Earthsea. The Master Hand, Ged’s teacher of spells on the Isle of the Wise, warns him of the dangers inherent in seeking to transform the essence of even so small a thing as a tiny rock, saying:

“. . . To change...even so small a scrap of the world, is to change the world....But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on that act. The world is in Equilibrium. A wizard’s power of Changing and of Summoning can change the balance of the world. It is dangerous...It must follow knowledge, and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow....”

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5 Ibid., 44.
In Le Guin’s world, the safety and preservation of life depends on maintaining the balance between good and evil, light and dark. In later volumes, Le Guin discusses the notion of good and evil reflected in balancing acquisitiveness and freedom and its effect on societies beyond the human one. But Le Guin’s moral code rests on the belief that what is right for oneself must be balanced against what is right for the entire community and the world.

For Socrates, disturbing the balance between good and evil by giving one side or the other of our souls freer reign would be irrational. He believes that no one would rationally choose evil because it represents a failure to understand the negative impact such a choice would have on the individual and the community, especially Socrates’s Republic. Choosing evil is the act of an irrational mind. Therefore, Plato believed that education was essential for the construction of a perfect society. In his model, evil represents a failure of reason, or an inability of the individual to properly understand the repercussions of one’s actions, not a failure of human character. To Socrates, the rational choice will always be the just choice. He also believed the human soul, the essence at the center of all choices, was more inclined to the good than to evil, because of our faculties of reason. Education was key to following an ethical path and avoiding doing evil. Le Guin’s novel reinforces Plato’s moral outlook, not only in the portrayal of a society in which education grants wizards wisdom over action and control of magic. It also

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reinforces the concept that balance between the two halves of a person’s identity must remain balanced in order to avoid doing evil.

Interesting, however, is the question that Foucault forces upon the discussion of an understanding of good and evil, especially when considering that, in the world of Earthsea, knowledge of magic is reserved for men trained at an exclusive enclave on the Isle of the Wise. When one considers the power structures inherent in modern American society in 1968, the year the novel was released, education in the United States was predominantly the province of white men. Access to education and the content of the curricula in American schools showed a heavily white, male, Christian bias concerning who should attend and what was acceptable to teach. Education as a means to better achieving a good or moral life biases the moral education of the society toward white Christian values. In Le Guin’s novel, Ged is from Gont. People of Gont have “dark copper-brown skin.”\(^8\) In choosing to portray her Archmage as a person of color, Le Guin subtly subverts the idea that education was the province of white society.

Inherent in Plato’s concept of evil as balance between two sides of the human soul, is the notion that evil is a radical, or root part, of human nature. Because of this, Socrates proposes the “Myth of The Metals” as a means to help determine who should rule his republic. Because distinct categories of human beings are inclined toward nobler or baser actions, depending on the “metal” from which they are made, he suggested that every individual is born with an appropriate station in life and an inherent ability to behave more or less ethically. Philosophers, those seeking knowledge, were made of

\(^8\) Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, 17.
gold. To insure the proper governing of the Republic, only those who pursued knowledge and avoided irrational behavior—philosophers—would govern. To Plato, evil results when an individual fails to perform his or her proper function in life.

Among the fantasy novels I examine, this concept is dramatically portrayed in Laini Taylor’s trilogy, Daughter of Smoke and Bone. In the alternative world of Eretz, the race of seraphim sees their enemies, the chimaera, as “dumb beasts.” The seraphim’s refusal to acknowledge chimaera intelligence, whose talents could contribute to their society, resulted in the enslavement and repression of the chimaera. Subjugated to an inappropriate station, the chimaera turn to war that eventually escalates to attempted genocide by both sides of the conflict. This situation exemplifies Plato’s notion that by failing to fulfill one’s function through the degradation of the chimaera, resulted in another, genocide.

Following Plato, Aristotle’s conception of virtue rests on one’s ability to find the middle between extremes of satisfying one’s desires to the point of gluttony and self-imposed deprivation. For Aristotle, the right action will fall between the extremes of excess and abnegation, or between excessive pursuit of the appetites and unrealistic denial of them. Further, Aristotle writes: “…to do the [right thing] to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy.” Aristotle believes evil occurs when one fails to treat others correctly, which requires an understanding of the individual’s needs and personal will.

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Right treatment must be neither too hard on oneself nor too weak. Otherwise it throws the individual off balance, and he or she becomes “disoriented.” According to Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. professor of philosophy at Fordham University, Aristotle’s mean between excess and abnegation is not merely finding the middle ground in any situation, but requires being able to rationally determine the appropriate mean position in all matters based on the circumstance and the individuals involved.

Finally, discounting Plato’s concept of Forms, Aristotle believes that evil is a fundamental part of our makeup as human beings. He rejects the notion that evil has a supernatural origin or Form. Therefore, he believes that it is possible for human reason and effort to overcome evil inclinations and allow the individual to be happy, which for Aristotle, is the purpose of human life. Aristotle clearly believes that “different things appear good to different people, and it so happens, even contrary things,” therefore, deriving a theory of evil from Aristotle’s writings can be a slippery project. However, fantasy writers over the last half of the twentieth century have written volumes in which their protagonists demonstrate Aristotle’s assertion, that humans are capable of overcoming the excessive pull of their desires to defeat evil. In Robert Jordan’s Wheel of Time series, Rand al’Thor, the hero who must face the ancient force of evil in this fantasy world, “The Dark Lord,” not only rejects the temptations of power and immortality promised by evil’s agents, “The Forsaken,” but he does so while also fighting for his

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Similarly, in works such as Andre Norton’s Witch World series, and Lloyd Alexander’s Prydain Chronicles, characters face repeated temptations from those around them to succumb to their baser drives and give in to their desires to dominate others through the control of magic or resources. Those who do are clearly the source of evil in those works.

Augustine of Hippo

Another influential writer whose thought has had a deep and lasting impact on Western notions of good and evil is Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE). His own struggle with the problem of evil in his personal life brought him into direct conflict with the religion of his childhood and led him to turn from the teachings of Mani, founder of the Manichaean faith, to Christianity. The characteristics of evil in Manichaean belief troubled Augustine, and his rejection of evil as a force equal to the force of good, led him to formulate one of his most important doctrines of human freedom: Original Sin.

“According to Manichaean teaching,” associate professor of the history of philosophy and theology at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, Byard Bennett writes:

…the existence of evil in the world was the result of a primordial invasion of the realm of Light by the forces of Darkness. In this invasion, a portion of the Light was seized and swallowed up by the Darkness. This seizure necessitated the formation of the present world as an arena in which the forces of Darkness were

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13 I discuss Jordan’s series in detail in Chapter 8.

14 Each of these series is discussed in later chapters.

to be subdued and the good Light particles liberated from the evil Matter in which they had become entrapped.\textsuperscript{16}

In Manichaean belief, evil and good had materiality and fought one another on both the human and the cosmic plain. Augustine found this concept of a material-particle basis for evil unacceptable and turned to the monotheism of his mother’s Christianity out of a profound rejection of the notion that there was an “entity [such] as ‘evil’ (\textit{malum}).” For Augustine, rather, “‘evil’ [was] merely a name for the privation of ‘good [\textit{privatio boni}].’”\textsuperscript{17} Augustine attempts to establish that, although evil influences the world through the actions of men and women, it does not have an independent ontological existence.

Although later thinkers would contradict Augustine, most notably Martin Luther, beginning with Augustine, Roman Catholic Christians would place the blame for evil on human origins, namely human choice based in our freedom, and a deficiency of the good.\textsuperscript{18} In this respect Augustine’s contribution to the portrayal of evil in literature serves to remove an external, supernatural cause for the action of agents in stories. Lloyd Alexander, Virginia Hamilton, and Laini Taylor represent evil emanating from individual human or societal choices, demonstrating the direct influence of Augustine’s thought.

Augustine, however, is far from the last word on the subject.


\textsuperscript{18} Christofer Frey, \textit{Good and Evil in Ethics}, 43; See also, I. Ivonoska, "The Demonology of Saint Augustine of Hippo" (Doctoral Dissertation, Saint Louis University, 2011); Terry Eagleton, \textit{On Evil} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
Martin Luther

Perhaps no single writer in Western thought has had quite as dramatic an impact on the popular imagination concerning the portrayal of evil as Martin Luther. Luther rejects Augustine’s reduction of evil to “nothingness” and sees evidence of Satan’s existence in the work of “godless humans.” Professor of German History at Rurh University in Bochim Germany, Dietmar Wyrwa, explains:

. . . Luther is usually interpreted in a way as if he tried to reject the Augustinian concept of *privatio boni*: "This will and this nature of Satan and the fallen human, turned away from God, is not Nothing. Because neither Satan nor the godless human is nothing, nor do they have no nature or no will, although their nature is corrupt and turned away from God." Luther's criticism aims against the evaporation of Evil into Nothingness.19

Luther’s legendary confrontations with the devil, whether religious vision or the result of a psychological disturbance, convince him that human beings are helpless in the face of evil’s supernatural power. Human will, or free choice, signifies the “tiniest spark of power”20 because, he believes the human will is like a beast ridden and fought over by God and Satan. “If Satan rides it, it wills and goes where Satan wills; nor can it choose to run to either of the two riders or to seek him out, but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it.”21 In contrast to Augustine, Luther sees human beings as imperfect instruments of God who alone has the power to set action in motion.22 Luther’s reduction of human beings to the tools of an evil or a good force in the universe appears

21 Ibid., 33.
22 Ibid., 95.
in numerous works of fantasy, most notably Robert Jordan’s Wheel of Time series. In that series the question of freedom and fate comes to the fore because of the circular nature of time in Jordan’s universe. His characters openly question the nature of their freedom to act in a world in which time repeats itself eternally. In that series and others, the image of human action driven by an evil force infuses the work with a sense of despair and hopelessness that comes from a sense that, no matter what the individual does, evil will always threaten human happiness. It provides tension, threatening characters’ freedom in the face of powers outside their control. In novels which portray such tensions (Anderson’s and Norton’s novels, for example) characters’ internal struggles over their roles in approaching evil forces offers the reader insight into how an individual must confront internal doubts and motivations before addressing the battle against evil.

Understanding Satan, as described in Western mythological and sacred texts, helps understand the portrayal of evil in fantasy literature. In his 2006 work, The Myth of Evil, Philip Cole explains that evil is less a theological concept than a mythological one. As an archetypal image, both Cole and Carl Jung trace the origins of Satan to the darker aspects of early concepts of God as depicted in myth and sacred texts. In early Jewish texts, writers divide images of God into two: one being who became solely responsible for good and one for the calamities of nature and evil actions. Jung argues that as images from our collective unconscious emerge more firmly into consciousness in early myths, the “opposites” contained in the image split apart. He explains:

…We…get [the good and the wicked] or a benevolent goddess and one which is malevolent and dangerous. In Western antiquity and especially in Eastern cultures the opposites often remain united in the same figure, though this paradox does not
disturb the primitive mind in the least…. The morally ambiguous Yahweh became an exclusively good God, while everything evil was united in the Devil. It seems as if the development of the feeling function in Western man forced a choice on him, which led to the moral splitting of the divinity into two halves.23

As Jung explains, the image of good and evil were once part of the same archetype. Cole argues that in the Book of Job, Satan is not a source of evil but acts as a member of God’s heavenly court and therefore merely follows God’s command when directed to test Job. Furthermore, in the Hebrew Bible no evil being exists, but we do encounter mal’ak Yahweh. Cole writes:

. . . mal’ak Yahweh, [is] an evil messenger of God, an evil spirit God sends out to do mischief in his name. The mal’ak is a dark spirit who lies and deceives at God's command. In books such as Judges, Kings, and Chronicles, the mal’ak slowly gains independence from God[…]..gradually its destructive aspect was emphasized; finally it became the personification of the dark side of the divine nature. The mal'ak was now the evil angel, Satan, the obstructer, the liar, the destroying spirit.24

Early in the Jewish tradition, neither Yahweh nor Satan is pure good or pure evil. Only later does Satan become the personification of evil. Cole argues that it is only in the New Testament, in the chronicles of the life of Jesus, that Satan becomes God’s “rival” and Christ’s tempter.25 As Cole explains, in Hebrew, the very name Satan means “adversary.”26 The images of a demonic force—the Dark, for example—moving through the world, enticing human beings to do its work against the gods and those who support them, appear as common motifs in fantasies for young adults.

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25 Ibid., 29.

26 Ibid., 210.
The manifestation of the Jungian archetype of duality, in which opposing characteristics exist in a single entity, springs from a society’s need to safely explore the meaning of contrary but balanced sides of life and human nature. In Western mythopoeic tradition, the division of the universe into both light and dark forces, battling against each other can be traced back to both the Hebrew Bible and to Manicheanism.

In Manichean tradition, the forces of darkness act independently of the forces of light, but they are equal in strength. Augustine argued that part of the error of Manichean theology was that, to Mani, Darkness was “not created, but [existed as] a First Principle” equal to God Himself.27 For the Manicheans, the Universe was composed of both dark (evil) and light (good) forces, neither of which could completely destroy the other. They stand eternally in opposition to one another.28

The image of powers locked permanently in battle against one another is deeply rooted in our cultural unconsciousness. It appears in many fantasies for young people and serves as an outlet for exploring the personal struggle between good and evil.

Although the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine frame the concepts of what we as a culture believe to be good and evil, it is the image of a dark, primordial essence, dismissed as “Nothing” by Augustine, but fixed upon and named as Satan by Luther, that skulks through American fantasies. Despite centuries of efforts to explain evil as a byproduct of incorrect reasoning (Plato), excessive appetite (Aristotle), or human freedom (Augustine), the human imagination continues to struggle with the notion that

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28 Ibid.
good and evil forces battle in the universe, and so writers express these notions in stories that depict that struggle and act as a model of evil originating in a force outside the self.

What is troubling about such a model is that it effectively removes responsibility for evil from the individual. When good and evil result from a force outside human control, human freedom loses significance. As characters such as Rand al’Thor in Jordan’s Wheel of Time series, and Skafloc and Valgard in Poul Anderson’s *The Broken Sword* struggle with questions of fate and are manipulated by supernatural forces, their attempts to act independently undermines American notions of duty, responsibility, justice, and freedom. In suggesting that we are mere pawns in an ancient battle, the authors of these novels question the very fabric of Western notions of freedom. At the heart of their stories, we find a response. For these fantasy writers, among others I examine, the key to confronting evil lies in both the choices humans make as well as the motivation behind those choices.

The ethical systems posited by these early Western theologians and philosophers were re-evaluated once later thinkers confronted the gap left by an Enlightenment rejection of revealed truth as a foundation for morality, and instead sought to ground their theories on Reason.

**Immanuel Kant’s Ethics and Morality**

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is among key thinkers who sought to firmly establish morality in something other than Judeo-Christian Revelation. Kant seeks to demonstrate that, because reason arrives at the same principles of morality as those of Christian tradition, Christian precepts of right and wrong can be considered both universal and
binding and therefore can be used as a basis for determining ethical behavior and moral thinking. In order to accomplish this he had to address the problem of empirical methods and knowledge.

In *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that an individual’s ability to know the moral law lies at the very center of what it means to be human. Kant’s approach, although grounded in Enlightenment tools, takes exception to empiricists’ ideas concerning knowledge and the way the mind acquires it. Like Plato, Kant rejects empiricism’s reduction of the human mind to merely a tool of perception. He sees human consciousness as capable of understanding not only the world of “phenomena” but “noumena” as well, despite the fact that the latter are not readily accessible to our senses. He asserts that the human mind is an active participant in the construction of knowledge, and so he reopens the door to a discussion of *a priori* knowledge on matters that transcend space, time, and sensory perception. That assertion makes it possible to think of the mind as an instrument able to discern universal principles, including universal principles of moral action. According to Kant, *all individuals* are capable of arriving at the same principles of morality and so all moral knowledge must be *a priori*.²⁹ Kant’s morality, like Augustine’s, places responsibility for moral outcomes squarely on the shoulders of individuals acting according to their own free will.

Kant further argues that, in addition to being discernible by all rational beings through *a priori* understanding, the “supreme principle of morality”³⁰ must

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³⁰ Ibid., §392.
fundamentally align with the individual’s will. Kant writes that the will, “estimable in itself and good without regard to any further end...holds first place in estimating the total worth of our actions.” Therefore, maxims concerning action must emanate from the individual’s will which “is itself a supreme lawgiver.” If a concept of morality is both established through *a priori* understanding and in line with the individual’s will, a maxim would be, not only universal, but also a “duty,” and so considered to be universally binding. In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explains that will is dependent upon the “reality of the concept of freedom” which “is the keystone of the whole system of pure reason.” Therefore, he believes, the will “legislates its own universal law.”

Furthermore, in order for any moral law to constitute a “categorical imperative,” he explains:

> . . . it must not [be] based on *any interest* and therefore it alone of all possible imperatives can be unconditional...[and] have as its object only itself regarded as legislating *universal* law. For only then are the practical principles and the imperative which the will obeys unconditional, inasmuch as the will can be based on no interest at all.

In other words, moral laws must reflect the interests of no specific individual’s will in order for it to reflect the universal will.

In Book Four of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant argues that because all rational beings are individually capable of knowing the moral law, they are

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31 Ibid., §397.

32 Ibid. §432.


34 Kant, *Grounding for a Metaphysics of Morals*, §431.

35 Ibid., §432 (emphasis added).
equally capable of achieving the objectives of moral laws, and therefore capable of becoming an individual who is “well-pleasing” to God. Such an individual is one who knows his or her duty with respect to the moral law, performs it freely, that is of his or her own free will, and absorbs the maxims of moral goodness into his or her character, and so becomes habitually the kind of person who acts in a morally good manner.36

Kant begins philosophy’s journey away from positivistic religion by declaring that religion reveals nothing that reason could not deliver itself. He seeks to remove morality from the dictates of clerics and religious rites. According to Kant, obedience to religious dogma produces empty actions incapable of moving an individual closer to the morally good disposition. Therefore religious prescriptions on moral action do not require internal alignment of the will with its own dictates and so offer little in the way of guiding human action and morality. Kant's main project is to establish that neither a faith in God nor belief in any positivistic religion is required for the establishment of a moral system. Instead, he seeks to establish a moral code that is both universal, and also grounded in the subjective rationality of every individual.

Fundamental to the discussion of Kant’s morality are principles that constitute his “Imperatives:” He writes that a person should 1) “never act except in such a way that [one] can also will that [one’s] maxim should become a universal law;”37 act as if the maxim of one’s action were to become through one’s will a universal law;38 and finally,

37 Kant, Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals, §402.
38 Ibid., §421.
that one should “act in such a way that [one] treat[s] humanity, whether in [one’s] own
person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as
a means.”

In Robert Jordan’s Wheel of Time series, the “Dark One” violates Kant’s moral
imperatives on nearly every count. It acts without regard to the implications of Its
actions in the fantasy universe, considering Its prerogative above all others, as when It
taints the male half of the “One Source” of the Power from which magic flows, for
example. In addition, It uses dozens of people and creatures against their wills for Its own
ends. But the Dark One is not the only character in The Wheel of Time series whose
actions can be seen as moral or not. Each of the main characters must evaluate the
circumstances in which they find themselves and decide for themselves which action is
morally correct for him or her personally. Characters such as Rand al’Thor, Egwene
al’Vere, and Mattrim Cauthon, approach morally ambiguous situations by deciding which
response carries the most morally appropriate weight. Often their rationale violates one or
the other of Kant’s Imperatives, but the freedom Kant allows within specific and personal
choices provides each character with the possibility of choosing morally. It is in the
decisions made by individuals, then, whether they decide on a course of action for
personal gain or in the need to act according to the dictates of a community, that the
characters in Jordan’s fantasy series reflect Kant’s moral imperatives.

These imperatives, grounded for Kant in reason, are the first steps in the
Enlightenment’s efforts to free mankind of our dependence on “irrational” dogma. Other

39 Ibid., §429.

40 The Dark One of Jordan’s novels is neither male nor female, and so the protagonist, Rand al’Thor uses the pronoun “It,” when addressing It.
Enlightenment writers, however, objected to Kant’s attempts to reduce morality to the product of rationality and “imperatives” attainable without any connection to religious dogma. Among the more radical was G. W. F. Hegel.

G.W. F. Hegel

German Idealist G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) attempted to refute Kant’s dismissal of Christian dogma and revelation as unnecessary to morality, and to prove as empty of meaning his reliance on reason as the sole guide to morality. Whereas Kant tried to release ethics from religious grounding, Hegel sees revelation and religious dogma as the necessary bridge between what our reason can discern for itself and what is, for him, at its base, the purpose of human existence: salvation in the Gospels and re-unification with the Christian God.

Like Kant, who sees history as a steady “continual progress and approximation toward the highest good possible on earth ...[in which] there is nothing mystical but moves ...naturally in a moral fashion”\textsuperscript{41} via the dictates of reason, Hegel, too, understands history itself as progress. Hegel, however, sees the events of the Gospel as “historical facts alongside all others.” Furthermore, for Hegel “they [are] decisive” events because in them he “discovers the clue to the whole of history...the clue is the knowledge of the divine Spirit itself.”\textsuperscript{42} For Hegel, the purpose of history lies in the reunification of God with man, brought about through the dialectical advancement of human society, the “spiritualization of man, or co-ordinately, Spirit becoming actual through its embodiment

\textsuperscript{41} Kant, \textit{Religion within Limits of Reason}, 126.

in an existing being, in man."\textsuperscript{43} History \textit{is} the working out of the Absolute Spirit in time. History records mankind’s movement from its self-conscious alienation from God, which occurred with the Fall of Adam in Paradise, to its reconciliation with God in the life of Jesus.

In \textit{Philosophy of History}, Hegel equates the “Fall of Man” with the loss of “contentment” that accompanied, the rise of our consciousness when humans were cast out of Paradise. Only when we gained consciousness did we gain knowledge of good and evil. He writes:

\begin{quote}
...This is a deep truth, that evil lies in consciousness: for the brutes are neither evil nor good.... Consciousness occasions the separation of the Ego, in its boundless freedom as arbitrary choice, from the pure essence of the Will —i.e. from the Good....This existence for self, this consciousness, is at the same time separation from the Universal and Divine Spirit. If I hold to \textit{my} abstract Freedom, in contraposition to the Good, I adopt the standpoint of Evil.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

The birth of human consciousness alienates us from our former union with the Divine Spirit. This idea, that through the rise of consciousness humans became aware of good and evil, echoes loudly in Ursula Le Guin’s Earthsea series as Ged puzzles through the source of the problems his world faces.

For Hegel, only through reunion with the Divine Spirit, by the reincarnation of Christ as human, is good made possible again in history. Hegel’s view of history is essential to his approach to morality, while Kant would reject it as untenable irrationality. Though he once had criticized religion’s moral proscriptions as mere dogma, Hegel later insists on the historicity of the Gospel events. He finds Kant’s reduction of morality to

\textsuperscript{43} Ib\textit{id.}, 248, 250.

carrying out the dictates of reason and the will unsatisfying and incomplete. He reasserts Christian dogma as the dialectical positing of Speculative Idealism, and the synthesis of the real and the rational, and thus gives ethical weight to Christian moral precepts. For Hegel, the historicity of the life of Jesus overcomes the positivistic human origins of Christianity. For him, because Jesus became a part of history, God as Jesus becomes discoverable for the empirical record and overcomes any temporal or geographic limitations inherent in other religions. The Truths of Christianity become historical through the Incarnation of Christ, and also became universally accessible, and, therefore, the ethics revealed through the Gospels are universally valid and binding.

By positing the “necessity” of Jesus’s life and the working of Absolute Spirit through history, Hegel returns the discussion of religious doctrine and revelation to a pre-Kantian acceptance of revealed religion. For Hegel, morality, the knowledge of the difference between good and evil, lies at the heart of what makes us human: our own rise from unconsciousness and our awareness of our separation from God. It is from this knowledge—that we are no longer in unity with God—that suffering, as alienation and evil, emanate.

Hegel, therefore, presents a problem for Enlightenment thinking from the standpoint of human freedom. Later philosophers, including Friedrich Nietzsche, question whether Hegel allows any space for human will, especially when it seems that he has removed the individual from the discussion altogether. Hegel does require human participation, however. For Hegel, “Subjective volition – Passion – is what sets men in activity...[and] effects its ‘practical’ realization....It is the Unity of the universal, essential
Will, with that of the individual\textsuperscript{45} which constitutes morality. For him the universal, the Absolute, cannot be actualized without being “concretized” through the particular. Hegel posits, “Action is always individual; it is always I who act. It is my purpose which I want to fulfill.”\textsuperscript{46} For Hegel, the individual must be held responsible for his or her actions—no matter what compels an individual to act. Once again, choice is key.

Hegel believes that it is essential for the individual to participate in the process of the reunification of mankind with the Divine. He requires the individual to actively participate in the protection of the freedom of all members of a society. According to Hegel, the individual’s task is as follows:

\begin{quote}
\ldots[to] sift through what [has been] inherited” from the group, and to “look inwards into the self and to know and determine from within oneself what is right and good.” It remains the responsibility of the individual to look for a better guide when “the existing world…has become unfaithful to the better will [and] this will no longer finds itself in the duties...accepted in this world... [He or she] must seek to recover in ideal inwardness alone that harmony which it has lost in actuality.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

Hegel proscribes the constraints a society holds over the individual’s own internal moral dictates, and allows him or her to remain free, even as he requires the retention of one’s responsibility to continuously hold the community’s practices up to comparison with the Gospel message. By requiring the individual to assess the “‘point’ of the society itself (and of any other societies [he or] she is familiar with),”\textsuperscript{48} Hegel provides a mechanism in which a society is kept in alignment with the “better will.” Each of us, then, is required to

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{45} Hegel, \textit{Philosophy of History}, 38.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 581.
\end{flushright}
examine the customs and habits of our community to make sure they align with our inner “better will.” While Hegel may have returned the discussion of morality to the level of positivistic Speculative Idealism, he does make the individual consciousness the final arbiter of what is contrary to individual freedom and thus lays responsibility for moral action squarely on the individual.

In Atwater-Rhodes novel, *Hawksong*, and Laini Taylor’s *Daughter of Smoke and Bone*, both written since 2000, the ideal that the individual must take a stand against the collective violation of ethical norms, undergirds the protagonists’ actions and sets them on their journey to rectify the evils found in their societies. In evaluating the nature of the wars their societies fight, the protagonists of these two 21st century authors’ works reflect a belief that the individual must take responsibility for moving a community toward right action. Determining what the right action is, of course, constitutes the central dilemma of all systems of ethics, especially in the postmodern environment that Richard Bernstein describes in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis*. Nevertheless, for Hegel the obligation is clear. Knowledge of right action compels the individual to act.

The conflict between Hegel and Kant represents the modern dilemma concerning the use of reason to arrive at a basis for moral behavior. Inherent in both Kant’s desire to demonstrate that reason and Christian revealed religion arrive at the same moral codes, and Hegel’s Speculative Idealism as the unfolding of the Spirit in Law and Communities is a trust in and acceptance of the Western Judeo-Christian concepts of right and wrong. While Kant and Hegel both sought to justify these conventions as, if not universal, at least grounded in something other than cultural tradition, their positions were not
intended to undermine the basic fundamental precepts of revealed Christianity. That role
would be performed, with great dramatic force, by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

**Friedrich Nietzsche, Ressentiment, and the Revolution in Western Morality**

With works such as *On the Genealogy of Morality*, and *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Friedrich Nietzsche revolutionized Western notions of good and evil. In those works, Nietzsche turns traditional notions of morality on their heads and insists that modern thinkers should reassess the very source and meaning of our concepts of right and wrong. Nietzsche argues that our Judeo-Christian morals arose from Jewish “ressentiment” in which the Jewish “slave revolt in morality” brought about an inversion of the values of right and wrong. He writes:

> The Jews have brought off that miraculous feat of an inversion of values, thanks to which life on earth has acquired a novel and dangerous attraction…: their prophets have fused “rich,” “godless,” “evil,” “violent,” and “sensual” into one and were the first to use the word “world” as an opprobrium. This inversion of values (which includes using the word “poor” as synonymous with “holy” and “friend”) constitutes the significance of the Jewish people: they mark the beginning of the slave rebellion in morals. \(^{50}\)

In any slave society all that is powerful, proud, and noble stands in opposition to conditions of the captive people. By positing a metaphysical world where slave conditions of poverty, powerlessness, and humility are rewarded later in a Heaven, Judeo-Christian morality effectively undermines the nature of our humanity. He rejects the Christian church’s unnatural imposition of restraint on human passion and a morality that denies human nature and its struggle to live, a notion he expresses in his term the

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“Will to Power.” For Nietzsche life seeks more life, and a morality of the future provides the individual with the freedom to genuinely express who he or she is. By requiring human beings to restrain our natural passions, the Christian Church requires that we reject the very essence of what we are as human beings.

By the time his madman decries the death of God in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche had already begun his effort at dismantling some of Western culture’s most tightly held beliefs about morality. The death of God is not something to be mourned, but an event to be celebrated. Nietzsche believes God’s death, or rather, the realization that European morality was “spiritually and intellectually bereft of any higher legitimacy than inertia and simple habit,” liberates humankind by knocking out from under us the fragile foundations upon which we had built our most fundamental concepts of morality and knowledge.

Further, Nietzsche rejects the very notion of any existence other than the world of the senses. Nietzsche’s protagonist in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* declares, “‘[T]he other world’ is well hidden from humans, that dehumaned, inhuman world that is a heavenly nothing.” Nietzsche rejects the concept that a reward in the afterlife is worth suffering in this world.

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To Nietzsche, the Judeo-Christian morality proclaimed in the Gospel amounted to the denial of ourselves and what makes us human: our breathing, feeling, desiring bodies. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he writes:

From the start, Christian faith is a sacrifice: a sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of the spirit; at the same time, enslavement and self-mockery, self-mutilation. There is cruelty...in this faith which is expected of an over-ripe, multiple, and much-spoiled conscience: it presupposes that the subjection of the spirit *hurts* indescribably.  

Nietzsche wants nothing less than for us to redefine the way we perceive ourselves and our relationship to the universe and to each other. Basic to Nietzsche’s concept of morality is a rejection of the belief that we must curb our passions, our freedom, and our very real will.

By proclaiming the death of God and rejecting an “other world,” Nietzsche demands that we start fresh. He insists that we must find a way to live free of the degrading definitions of good that we have relied upon for so long, notions which put the community before the individual, and require mere obedience. Instead, he suggests that we must find a way to define *ourselves*, and reject the dangerous dictates of “religious neurosis” which demand “solitude, fasting, and sexual abstinence.”

By redefining the good, as an affirmation of life, Nietzsche rejects the Christian imposition of guilt upon mankind for acting human, and he redefines not only morality but our essential nature as well. “When man no longer regards himself as evil he ceases to be so!”

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54 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §46.

55 Ibid., §47.

However, by rejecting traditional Christian morality, the very underpinnings of modern life which ordered Western culture and which also limited our freedom, a new problem arises. How will we define ourselves and our relationships with each other in this new freedom? When the boundaries that previously proscribed our lives evaporate, as they must, Nietzsche says, with the death of God, he leaves us gasping in the face of a new kind of limitlessness: our own monumental insignificance in the face of the infinite. Now each of us must seek for ourselves a purpose to our existence despite the abyss Nietzsche saw stretching out before us. In constructing this new meaning, Nietzsche relies on the force of life itself, his notion of the Will To Power.

Life, Nietzsche proclaims, seeks more life. All life, in order to live, struggles against efforts to stifle it. “What the individual calls his ‘will’ is a plurality of instincts and impulses in constant battle with one another to gain the upper hand.”57 However, what others have interpreted as his suggestion that life is an unmitigated struggle, he posits as a less antagonistic, more self-actualizing self. Nietzsche’s self is a concrete, feeling, willing, grounded thing. It is “constructed”58 over the course of a lifetime in every action, desire, and thought of the individual. It is through and in the sensuous, thinking, acting self that the Nietzschean concept of the Will to Power expresses itself. Because it cannot be separated from the body that it occupies, it therefore cannot search for satisfaction or fulfillment in any “otherworldly” or unseen realm. The Enlightenment division of the “self” into matter and mind was responsible for the enslavement of our

57 Allison, New Nietzsche, 9.

natural drives and the cause of a dangerous and debilitating individuation which brought about not only the bifurcation of our selves, but also our separation from one another.

Nietzsche believes this metaphysical dualism cannot sustain life. His notion of will precedes all thought, being, and life. As he writes in *The Birth of Tragedy*, “Since the ‘will’ is by definition outside the realm within which one can speak of individuation and the distinctness of one ‘thing’ from another, it has a kind of primordial unity.”59 The will is made of the united forces of the Apollonian and Dionysian in the individual which became bifurcated in Greece under the influence of Socrates. It is against this division that Nietzsche’s Will to Power as a framework of morality reorients life toward the reunion of our most basic drives.

As a theme in fantasy literature, the division of human drives is depicted as unhealthy or dangerous in stories such as Anne McCaffrey’s Dragon Riders of Pern series. In McCaffrey’s pseudo-science fiction-fantasy series, women must forsake their personal passions and submit wholly to the wishes and desires of their dragons in order to be truly fulfilled as riders. In addition, in Virginia Hamilton’s Justice Trilogy, the struggle between Thomas Douglass and his brother Levi dramatizes a negative understanding of the exertion of one person’s will over that of another. Thomas’s efforts to control his brother’s life, without regard for how his actions effect Levi, brings to life the implications for a morality, which some have come to believe Nietzsche asserts in his notion of Will to Power, that might makes right. More commonly, however, Nietzsche’s concepts of morality are depicted as the evil to be overcome, taking his concept of

unfettered passion and Will to Power to their extreme. Such interpretations, while horrific, betray a misunderstanding of Nietzsche’s genuine interest in freeing humankind from the constraints of positivistic religions.

For example, in the Prydain Chronicles, the evil king Arawn, the Death Lord of Annuvin, has stolen and hoarded all the magical tools and secrets that make human life easy. In Nietzschean terms, he has imposed his own Will to Power over those who are weaker. Nietzsche, though, would assert that the free exercise of human passions in the material world is preferable to slavery and a deferred reward, but that freedom does not allow the strong to exploit the weak. Instead, in the world of the Übermensch, individuals achieve a healthy level of happiness and satisfaction of their own desires more easily if they are not restrained by slave morality of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and seek fulfillment of life’s needs on their own terms. To Nietzsche, King Arawn would be evil, because not even he is taking advantage of the objects that make life livable. His hoarding distorts the purpose of the objects’ creation and does not fulfill his life.

Nietzsche calls us to a more genuinely human expression of ourselves, not to isolation and rejection of human community. As the prophet-protagonist Zarathustra explains to the Sun in the opening pages of Nietzsche’s novel, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, “‘You great star! What would your happiness be if you had not those for whom you shine?...I need hands that reach out...Zarathustra wants to be human again.’” Nietzsche calls on us to embrace life among a community, life in all its sensory richness, to construct meaning for our own lives, and to share ourselves with others in a way that is

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60 Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 3.
often denied us. It is from this notion of the Will to Power that a response emerges to the challenge posed by the demon in the *Gay Science*. Faced with living the same life over and over through eternity Nietzsche calls on us to choose lives that genuinely exhilarate us. Only then would we face the demon’s offer of living “the life as [we] now live it and have lived it…once more and innumerable times more“\(^61\) without dread. Only then could we truly “*crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal”\(^62\) of a life well disposed toward ourselves. For Nietzsche, evil lies not in a rejection of religious dogma but in the denial of ourselves as human beings.

### Postmodern Confusion

Since Nietzsche, postmodern confusion has cast doubt on our ability to know right from wrong, and distinguish good from evil. Without a traditional religious or supernatural notion upon which to ground a definition, evil begins to take on a different shape. In his chapter on AIDS and Evil in *Evil After Postmodernism*, writer and former Fellow at the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, David B. Morris explains that evil in the modern world begins to be associated with human suffering in every and all its manifestations. He writes:

> Evil, from a postmodern perspective, is as malleable as the suffering with which it has increasingly come to be identified. Filmmakers, [and writers], of course, continue to create stories depicting evil as an indestructible cosmic force, breeding new legions in a distant galaxy, or as a deathless Gothic legacy that lives on in vampires, swamp creatures, and ax murders. As we might expect, there is no single postmodern voice of evil. Some postmodern voices prove especially gripping because they call upon an archaic and primitive dread that may belong to the evolutionary history of human kind. The malleability of evil, of course, ranks

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\(^62\) Ibid., § 341.
among its most ancient features: Satan is the archetypal shape-shifter. Yet, a postmodern perspective provides a major difference in viewing the malleability of evil as, at last a cultural artifact.\(^{63}\)

Evil, according to Morris, manifests itself in myriad forms, as varied as the individuals who suffer it. Defining it remains a component of cultural and personal perspective. It lives on in our dreams, our cultural artifacts, such as young adult literature and movies and our political rhetoric. However, according to Jennifer Geddes, assistant professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, a more insidious problem underlies the postmodern dilemma of how to define evil. She notes that to postmodern thinking, evil has lost its intellectual credibility. Postmodernism, she explains:

\(\ldots\) refrains from making any moral judgments whatsoever, either out of fear of offending someone (or anyone) or out of apathy, a kind of bland tolerance towards everything....Both extremes avoid the difficulty of grappling with evil after postmodernism: fundamentalism by thoughtlessly applying the term “evil,” moral relativism, by thoughtlessly discarding it.\(\ldots\)

\(\ldots\)According to this view the word "evil" is seen as a holdover from metaphysical and religious vocabularies that have been revealed by postmodern thought to be oppressive, binary, totalizing, and exclusionary.\(^{64}\)

Because modern scholars see evil as an archaic and imprecise concept and the difficulty they have in naming or addressing the idea of evil, they have banished it from their discussions. Meanwhile, politicians and the information media of the greater culture hurl the term around as if there is consensus on what evil looks like. The most important clue I found as to what the authors of the books I examine consider to be evil was to identify the enemy the hero faces. In each of the novels I examine, the protagonist must go to battle. What he or she faces in that battle I have demarcated as the evil. Despite that standard, a


definition remains elusive. At times evil is portrayed as a supernatural force. At other times it is based in human choice. And at still other times, it is portrayed as a combination of the two concepts. Because of these issues, my examination of evil in fantasy novels transformed from a hunt for an evil force to a search for fantasy novelists’ answer to confronting evil. In that exploration, fantasy authors offer new solutions to evil in the world.

Terry Eagleton, distinguished academic and critic in both the United States and the United Kingdom, explains in *On Evil*, that modern humanism and liberal postmodernism attempt to explain away evil as something “savage, irrational, and obscene in humanity.” He wonders how a belief system “which turns its eyes in civilized distaste from what is truly diabolical in humanity, hopes to vanquish it?” His answer: “We should embrace the demonic in order to defeat it.” Until we accept that evil is not a force “out there” in the universe, but rather has roots in the human psyche, it will continue to plague society in all its manifestations.

Eagleton’s advice resonates throughout the novels of the postmodern American authors writing since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In works as diverse as those by Atwater-Rhodes, Taylor, and Maggie Steifvater, protagonists step toward the evil their societies face rather than continue an eternal cycle of revenge and ever more brutal means of war. By stepping toward, rather than away from the enemy, these writers give their protagonists reasons to show compassion, offer hope, and attempt to see beyond differences in a search for their common humanity. In order to end the evil

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65 Eagleton, *On Evil*, 70.

66 Ibid., 69.
perpetrated by those we consider the Other, or the evil we commit in confronting the Other, we must approach them with an openness that sidesteps our own desire for victory, or revenge.

Hence, we require a new approach to the Other. If neither the fruits of modern Reason, nor the traditions of our past can ground our moral compass and help us engage with those who our culture brands as evil, where are we to turn? Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) offers the most promising response to living with the Other in a multicultural world and addressing how to embrace evil and defeat it. His concept of fusing “horizons” born out of his ideas on hermeneutics, requires that we face questions of morality and difference with openness, rather than fear or dread, and love rather than hate.

**Gadamer, Hermeneutics, and Fused Horizons**

Hans-Georg Gadamer’s most important contribution to ethics and formulating a morality come from his insights into hermeneutics. In addition, his analysis of the way meaning occurs, as it is related to historical and literary texts and works of art, serves as a model for achieving understanding in our daily lives when differences of outlook and opinion come into conflict. In his account of the “hermeneutic circle,” a kind of intellectual dialogue takes place between the “interpreter,” or historian, and the object of his or her inquiry. Both subject and object exchange meanings and neither is left unchanged. Seeking understanding contributes to one’s “being as becoming,” and as he explains in *Truth and Method*, understanding “is concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and
determinative of it.”⁶⁷ Like Foucault, Gadamer recognizes that everything we experience affects our consciousness. No action, no decision, no thought occurs in a vacuum.

Early in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains the impact culture has on the way an individual looks at the world. He writes:

…Every single individual...finds in the language, customs, and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own....[T]he world into which he is growing is one that is humanly constituted through language and custom.⁶⁸ Like Foucault, Gadamer sees the individual as constituted by the world into which he or she is born. Because of this, our ability to understand anything or anyone who comes from a different culture is limited by our prejudices and cultural conditionedness.⁶⁹ In order to interpret a text, an event in history, or a work of art, one must remain open to the object’s “body of material” and to approach it with an understanding that it can teach us something. In order to best accomplish this, we must “fore-ground”⁷⁰ our prejudices, or “fore-meanings.”⁷¹ We must first engage in a form of personal inner self-dialogue to better understand how our own horizon or “situation”—the traditions or cultural conditions that effect our conceptions or expected meanings—“limit the possibility of vision. [A] horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point,”⁷² and so is the cultural conditionedness from which we approach any question of morality and of what is right or wrong. Only when we have our

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⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.
⁶⁹ Ibid., 529.
⁷⁰ Ibid., 298.
⁷¹ Ibid., 270.
⁷² Ibid., 301.
own limited understanding firmly before our consciousness can we approach the object of our inquiry in “openness.” Such openness does not require agreement, or acceptance, or submission, but is merely a means of finding a path that can expand our horizons on an issue so that a new response can be elicited.

Gadamer, like other voices of postmodernism, does not seek to assert one way of seeing the world as dominant or necessary for deciding future questions of morality. Instead, by applying the methods of hermeneutics, which help the questioner to get at a “Truth” within a text, an event, or a work of art, he offers a more productive approach to handling differences of vision. By applying this model, the possibility of a “fusing of horizons,”73 of openness, of understanding can occur. In Gadamer’s hermeneutics, no horizon, or position within a tradition of ethics, or definition of good or evil need feel threatened by any other.

What is required for each of us is, Gadamer suggests:
 . . . to experience the Thou truly as the Thou—i.e. not to overlook his claim [to Truth] but to let him really say something to us....Openness to the other...involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so....[I must acknowledge that the Thou] has something to say to me.74

Gadamer’s model of understanding differences, actions, or decisions concerning questions of morality becomes a response informed by a dialogue both within oneself and with the Other in whatever form the Other may appear. Although we live in the concrete conditions of history, as Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Foucault all acknowledge, our horizons shift and change all the time. That is why Gadamer insists that morality

73 Ibid. 306.
74 Ibid., 354.
must be grounded on a type of knowledge that, like Aristotle’s ethics, directs action, rather than dictates it. It cannot be grounded in rationality, historical tradition, or the dictates of our Will alone. As Distinguished Professor of Political Science and the Director of the Center for Ideas & Society at the University of California, Riverside, Georgia Warnke explains in *Hermeneutics, Ethics, and Politics*, “We make and remake our ethical knowledge and ourselves in...changing circumstances...[as we] apply the ethical knowledge we already possess”75 to new and different situations; situations that thinkers like Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, or Aristotle could never have anticipated.

Gadamer’s solution avoids Kant’s assumption that reason will bring all rational beings to the same conclusions about right behavior, as he seeks to root morality in the conditions of experience. Gadamer reaffirms the wisdom specific traditions provide that Hegel found essential. He also acknowledges Nietzsche demand for consideration of our human needs. Gadamer wants us to apply our reason and experiences, but also to accept how tradition affects behavior and our values. Questions of ethics must “consider who we already are and who we want to become...[how] the decisions we make will affect and modify the considerations we can make in the future.”76 Gadamer’s response to the postmodern reluctance to establish one unifying morality does, however, allows us to overcome the definitions of evil found in Kantian rationality, Hegelian historicity, and Nietzschean sensuality.

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76 Ibid., 91.
Conclusion

The Western concept of ethics has undergone shifts in approach since the earliest days of the Enlightenment when philosophers and theologians attempted to preserve a Judeo-Christian foundation for morality. These shifts succeeded both in establishing new foundations and exacerbating confusion. With changing claims to knowledge and truth, and changing approaches to how one makes moral decisions, the tension between the modern and postmodern has, to some degree, been transcended by Gadamer’s work in hermeneutics. Understanding how U.S. culture perceives the good and, hence, reacts to and defines evil is essential to a discussion of how evil and the Other are portrayed in literature for young people. If literature reflects a culture’s norms and is a pedagogical tool with which to pass on such norms, we must examine what the literature for young people suggests about good and how to approach the Other.

Kant suggests that all rational beings will agree on what is morally right or good so any Other who violates that standard is by definition evil. Hegel, on the other hand, grounds moral norms in the habits and dogma of a Christian community. Nietzsche shook the foundations of Western tradition by declaring Judeo-Christian morality a slave morality and let loose a torrent of nihilistic apprehension. Other writers have contributed to the debate. Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Luther explore the origins of evil that continue to influence American society. The images of evil that populate young adult fantasies over the last 65 years continue to present evil as part of a duality in the universe, or to personify evil in the form of the alien Other, characterized as savages or demons. Examples of each of these paradigms are found in young adult fantasy literature from 1950 to 2014.
How writers settle the conflict between warring parties in their novels model and reflect our nation’s approach to evil and the Other. Gadamer provides a theoretical framework for overcoming a perception that our enemies are evil. While he does not offer specific criteria for determining what is evil or good, he does provide a means for approaching, understanding, and embracing differences among actors in a multicultural society. Writers such as Margaret Atwater Rhodes, Christopher Paolini, and Laini Taylor have created fantasy works in which characters bridge the gap between age-old enemies and seek understanding to end conflict. Their stories dramatize what seeking common ground and giving witness to the “humanity” of the enemy looks like. In the Daughter of Smoke and Bone Series, readers witness individuals foregrounding their prejudices and preconceptions about the enemy, despite what seems to be unbridgeable gaps in culture in order to find intersecting goals and a way to forge peace.

Gadamer’s hermeneutics offers a powerful new approach to ending conflict by bridging unbridgeable differences. The framework he provides promises hope that in the paths to peace these writers portray American youth will find models for how to approach those we perceive as different. As American politicians, foreign policy analysts, and the mainstream media employ rhetoric and imagery that equates the Other with evil and demonizes our enemies, it becomes urgent to examine the messages young people receive through the literature they read about how we as a society confront evil. In the following chapters I turn to the fantasy literature itself. I look at the American political, historical, and social context in order to identify who Americans considered evil at the time the work was published. In doing so I demonstrate changing American attitudes toward evil and how to approach the Other.
CHAPTER 5

THE 1950S –
THE COLD WAR, CONFORMITY, CONTAINMENT, AND
CONFRONTATION WITH THE OTHER

Imagination is not something apart and hermetic, not a way of leaving reality behind; it is a way of engaging reality.

~Irving Howe

Introduction

With this chapter, I begin my analysis of how the historical conditions, social discourses, and events in post-World War II America shaped fantasy literature for young adults. In many ways, the 1950s is a natural starting point for this analysis because it marks a turning point in the social and political history of the United States, and also important developments in young adult literature. These two cultural moments left deep imprints on subsequent socio-political and literary history in the United States.

Complacency and Its Discontents

After witnessing the horrors of two world wars, a devastating economic depression, and the cultural upheavals that war and hard economic times bring, Americans of the 1950s were ready for something better. Retrospectively, the popular image of the era is one of war-weary Americans emerging into the second half of the twentieth century ready to satisfy “deferred dreams” of domesticity,¹ eager to purchase a

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¹ Peter J. Filene, “Cold War Culture Doesn’t Say It All,” in Rethinking Cold War Culture eds. Peter J. Gilbert and James Burkhart (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 163.
plethora of newly available consumer products, and universally enjoying a feeling of personal and national security born of the sacrifices of years of war.

The lived reality of American families in the postwar years is more complex. This image, of a nation striving together for peace, tranquility, and the modern conveniences of well-appointed homes in newly expanding suburbs, obscures an underlying fear of those who were different, a struggle for self-determination, and a straining against societal and cultural proscriptions concerning success, equality and lifestyle choices. Social critics of the era, such as Leerom Medovoi, professor of Literature and head of the English Department of the University of Arizona, and author of numerous articles on the intersection of social reality and literature, sees the newly emerging climate of consumerism and conformity as the beginning of a nation obsession with affluence and superficiality. She writes that among contemporary elite social commentators there existed a “palpable fear” that America was sinking into a slumber of passivity and enslavement to a newly achieved affluence. The emergence of the so-called corporate man, the exodus of women from the workforce, and the concomitant draining of the cities to the exploding suburbs, all contribute to the image of 1950s American culture as one of homogeneity, prosperity, and growth. The growing demands for social justice among marginalized communities, the threat of nuclear war, and contentious domestic politics contradict that perception of the era. American society of the 1950s was neither peaceful, egalitarian, or politically harmonious.

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By 1950, the pride and jubilation over the defeat of fascist powers in Europe and victory in the Pacific had faded as Americans turned their focus to satisfying the dreams they had deferred through the long years of the Great Depression and the Second World War.\(^3\) Seen through the lens of social justice, however, historians and sociologists also characterize the 1950s in darker, more sinister tones. With the detonation of an atomic bomb by the Soviet Union in August 1949, the U.S. monopoly on nuclear weaponry ended, and with its passing, the world entered a new era. A nuclear-armed Soviet Union ushered in the reality of Cold War conflict, and the ever-present possibility of “mutual assured destruction,” or MAD. At home, as white-collar jobs expanded and corporations welcomed military veterans into their offices, the concept of the “Company Man” permeated white middle-class society. Widespread suburban expansion into family-centered communities and a growth in consumerism led to the loss of individuality and an increase in segregated communities. Despite the veneer of progress, prosperity, and conformity, America was beginning to show signs of deep divisions as a burgeoning Civil Rights movement gained momentum. Growing discontent, specifically among African Americans, Hispanic Americans (both citizens and immigrants), unskilled labor, and agricultural workers,\(^4\) contradict the image of the era as one of security, conformity, and prosperity. Any understanding of the cultural influences and discourses that shaped the fantasy literature of the 1950s must include both mainstream America, as perceived by the writers and readers at the time, as well as the political, social, and economic

\(^3\) Peter Filene, “Cold War Culture Doesn’t Say it all,” 163.

\(^4\) Concerning labor unrest in the 1950s, see especially Filene “Cold War Culture Doesn’t Say It All,” and Daniel A. Cornford, *Working People of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
conditions of those who stood outside of that mainstream. Life for young people in American suburbs differed substantially from that of their urban-dwelling or rural predecessors and peers in ways that would come to define the era. At the same time, literary works that directly appealed to adolescent readers, such as J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher In the Rye* (1951),\(^5\) C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) and J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), and the burgeoning field of speculative fiction, transformed children’s and young adult literature.

Into this milieu of white conformity, complacency, and spreading discontent among African American, Asian American, and Latinos/as, Poul Anderson launched two fantasy novels: *Three Hearts and Three Lions*,\(^6\) and *The Broken Sword*.\(^7\) In these novels, using the conventions of fantasy literature, Anderson explores and comments on America’s intolerance and fear of the Other, taking a close look at American preconceptions about faith, fate, responsibility, fairness, free will, and power.

**Holger Carlsen and the Forces of Chaos**

The first of Anderson’s novels, *Three Hearts and Three Lions* opens with an unnamed narrator recounting an evening when he and a friend, Holger Carlsen, an engineer and a Danish migrant to the United States, attend a lecture together on “the new

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\(^5\) Published in 1951, J. D. Salinger’s seminal work was not considered appropriate for young readers at the time of its publication, but the novel’s high school-age protagonist has made it a favorite of teenagers since its publication. This work is considered by many to be the first true young adult novel.


cosmology” in which a physicist asserts the possibility of “other universes.” A trained engineer, Holger dismisses the lecturer’s suggestion of the mathematical possibilities of entire cosmoses co-existing with ours as “‘Voodoo.’” “I am me, here and now, drinking some not very good liquor,” is his response to the narrator’s efforts to explain the “metaphysics” behind the speech.

Beginning on the very first page, the award-winning Anderson lends the narrative an air of verisimilitude by grounding the story in historical events familiar to 1950s readers.

Anderson knew that Americans of the 1950s believed science and technology would be key to American success as a world leader. By acknowledging the reader’s faith in science, in this single stroke Anderson sets aside his audience’s objections to the impossibility of the story that follows and invites the reader to help construct the story with him.

Soon after that evening of “voodoo,” Germany’s Third Reich invades Denmark and ousts the royal government. With that, Holger gets “a fixation that he must return home.” Upon returning to Denmark he joins the Danish Resistance.

One night, while on a mission to smuggle out of Denmark a man whose abilities the Allies needed “rather badly,” Holger fights alongside his Danish brothers-in-arms. As he fires “at shadowy leaping forms…” suddenly “all his world blew up in flame and

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8 Ibid., 8.
9 Ibid., 9.
10 See my discussion of Sarewitz and Anderson in Chapter 2.
Holger awakens to find himself naked and shaken, resting under an ancient, gnarled tree, seemingly very far from the battlefield where he had been fighting. He doesn’t know where he is or how he got there. Indeed, he isn’t even sure he is in Denmark anymore. The forest around him seems old and thriving, teaming with wildlife that hasn’t been seen in Denmark for a very long time. He wanders into a nearby barn looking for help and finds a horse that seems to know him, or is, at least, very “friendly to strangers.” He feels “an instant affection” for the animal whose name, he discovers is Papillon. There, too, he discovers a knight’s kit that fits him perfectly with three hearts and three lions as a coat of arms. Vague memories of this horse and this sigil nag at him, but he cannot hold on to them long enough to make coherent sense of what they can tell him. Soon, he also discovers that he has talents and knowledge he has no recollection of acquiring: he seems to have a natural ability to ride the horse, despite never having spent any time in the saddle, and Pappillon seems to anticipate his riding habits, responding to him in ways that Holger cannot explain. He also soon discovers he has a skill for swordplay and the ability to speak and understand ancient Danish.

In an effort to determine where he is, Holger stumbles into the home of an ancient peasant woman named Mother Gerd, a self-proclaimed dabbler in “‘minor magics.’” Mother Gerd offers to help Holger answer his questions about where he is and how to get

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12 Ibid., 11.
13 Ibid., 13.
14 Ibid., 15.
15 Ibid., 18.
home. To do so, she calls upon a “demon” helper. As the witch summons the spirit, Holger begins to question his own grip on reality. She performs a ceremony using concentric circles and a tripod brazier that makes Hoger’s “hackles” rise. Holger sees dark red eyes in a swirl of smoke and hears a voice that speaks in words he cannot understand. Something odd is happening, but he’s too much a man of reason to let such strange things shake his faith in mathematics and the laws of physics. Mother Gerd is “nuts” he concludes, but he heeds her advice, anyway. The demon in Mother Gerd’s smoke suggests that Holger should visit Duke Alfric of Faerie. The Duke, she explains, represents the best hope of finding a means to return Holger home. Accompanied by a forest dwarf named Hugi as a guide, Holger sets out to find the Faeries of the Middle World.

In this unfamiliar world, Holger encounters Faerie kings and maidens, trolls, giants, forest gnomes, and a human girl named Alianora, who, with the help of a magic cloak of feathers, transforms into a swan. As Holger explores this magical realm in hopes of understanding his predicament, trying desperately to explain the rules of magic using the laws of physics, he begins to believe that somehow he has actually been transported to an alternate universe. He also discovers that, in this world, time can be bent, magic can alter a man’s appearance, and friendships can endure for centuries. The questions discussed

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16 Ibid., 21.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 20.
with his unnamed interlocutor of the first pages of the novel return. Holger wonders “What-where-when”\textsuperscript{19} is he?

As Holger begins his quest to unravel the mystery of where he is, how he got there, and why he has been transported to this place “beyond his own time, perhaps beyond his whole world,”\textsuperscript{20} he soon learns of a brewing conflict there. He engages with individuals, both human and fantastic, as he comes to believe that his arrival here has not been accidental. He learns that he must play a pivotal role in the looming battle between two powerful forces: Law and Chaos. Anderson’s binary matches the prevailing view of a world divided between good and evil.

Using themes and characters from medieval myths and legends, Anderson explores this traditional fantasy motif. In Anderson’s tale, however, the ancient story takes on new meaning when interpreted from the perspective of the twentieth century’s two most prominent conflicts. In post-World War II America, two principal enemies dominated the newspaper headlines of the age: the lingering memory of horrific Nazi crimes and its war to dominate Europe, and the expanding communist threat to the United States and Western society from communism, both in the Soviet Union and recently born in communist China. Although the story begins and ends with Holger battling Gestapo patrols in Denmark during World War II, the specter that haunts the pages of Anderson’s story allude repeatedly to the social-political threat that the Soviet Union posed to the “freedom-loving” west of the 1950s.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 24.
In Anderson’s novel, the forces of “Chaos” threaten those on the side of “Law.” While Holger steadfastly stands for Law, he consistently engages in an internal debate with himself about why he shouldn’t abandon the fight and settle down to enjoy the obvious comforts of a simpler more rustic life, and the attention of a beautiful woman. Anderson’s novel mirrors the struggle in United States at the time. While mid-twentieth-century Americans sought domesticity and peace, they faced new responsibilities as a world power.

Like Holger, Americans in the 1950s felt the tug to relax and enjoy a well-earned rest; however, world events dictated that they shoulder the burden of battling the encroaching armies of communism in defense of liberty and peace around the globe. Despite the fact that at every turn Holger confronts evidence that he must play a pivotal role in battling Chaos, Holger only wants “to hide… from all the worlds and all their cruelties.”\(^\text{21}\) As he witnesses injustice, oppression, and the threatening advance of an evil force against innocent people, Anderson’s protagonist steps into his role as “Defender.”\(^\text{22}\) As the Defender, Holger stands in for Americans reluctantly confronting the frightening, yet imperative responsibility of facing down the growing Soviet threat to liberty and democracy around the world.

**Elves versus Trolls and the Ultimate Weapon**

In the second fantasy novel Anderson published in the 1950s, *The Broken Sword*, he addresses another social reality facing Americans of the 1950s: a society divided and at war with itself. In *The Broken Sword* Anderson employs the legends and gods of Norse

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\(^{22}\) Ibid., 158.
mythology to explore a society in which elves and trolls are in perpetual combat for control of the non-human world. In their never-ending war they have so demonized one another that they commit horrific atrocities in the name of eradicating the enemy, until finally, one side unleashes a weapon so powerful that it has the potential to bring about “the doom of the world.” In *The Broken Sword*, Anderson tells a cautionary tale about the horrors of war, the danger of unrestrained hatred, and the implications of unleashing the ultimate weapon. In 1950s America, both international and domestic enemies are called to mind.

At the start of *The Broken Sword*, an elf earl, Imric, steals a human baby from Christian Orm of Jutland and his wife Ælfrida. He replaces the child with a half-troll, half-elf copy of the original child he created through dark magic and the rape of a troll prisoner of war. As the halfling baby named Valgard grows, his true nature—a murderous, unlovable, fratricidal Berserker—manifests itself, and his family and community reject him as dangerous and unlovable. Whipped into a frenzy of jealousy by a witch who is bent on revenge against Valgard’s father, the hafling slays his human family and offers his sisters to the troll king as concubines hoping to gain favor with the trolls.

Meanwhile, Skafloc, the true child of Orm and Ælfrida lives the carefree life with his Alfheim family. At his naming ceremony, a messenger from Æsir, the pantheon of Norse gods, offers Skafloc a gift: a broken sword to be used when “‘Skafloc stands in sore need of a good weapon.’” Imric, his adoptive father accepts the gift with trepidation,

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knowing that “the Æsir had some purpose of their own”\textsuperscript{24} in giving such a gift. What the elves understand, and the reader learns as the story progresses, is that the sword is the infamous \textit{Tryfing}, the legendary sword that “brings victory” to its wielder, yet is also his bane.\textsuperscript{25} Few readers of the 1950s would have missed the subtle reference to the ever-growing nuclear arsenal in the reader’s own world as the United States and the Soviet Union tested and stockpiled the ultimate weapon of mass destruction. Furthermore, Imric’s hesitation hints at the ominous nature of a “gift” the gods offer.

As Skafloc grows, he learns magic and elf culture, rejecting all connections to his human origins, including the religion of the new God of humans, the “White Christ.” Later, in a battle against his adoptive people’s mortal enemy, the trolls, Skafloc rescues a pair of maidens—the two Valgard has offered to the troll king—and falls in love with Freda, unaware that she is his biological sister. When all seems lost, and the trolls have conquered the lands of the elves, Skafloc dares to have the cursed sword re-forged. As Skafloc and Valgard desperately fight to prevent the annihilation of their adoptive races, they inexorably move toward a final battle to the death. It is in examining the deep irrational hatred between the trolls and elves and revealing the inevitable atrocities perpetrated by both sides in the name of victory, that \textit{The Broken Sword} offers readers a chance to ponder the futility and horror of war, racial animosity, and the danger of wielding weapons that cause as much harm to the victor as to the vanquished.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 159.
The 1950s: Americans and the World

In *Three Hearts and Three Lions* and *The Broken Sword*, soulless atheists threaten Christian beliefs and mores. In the world in which Holger finds himself in *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, Anderson disguises fascism and communism as Chaos. Holger fights on the side of Law (democracy and freedom). Anderson’s terms, Law versus Chaos, reflect the very heart of the battle Americans had recently fought in Europe and the Pacific. Chaos had indeed engulfed the world: the mass murder of Jews, gays and lesbians, the Roma, and others considered undesirable by Nazi Germany; the Japanese invasion and occupation of Asian nations; the division of Europe into totalitarian versus democratic camps; the fall of the Iron Curtain; and the development and deployment of the most destructive weapon in history. Just as Americans perceived their role in the previous war as having rescued Europe, Holger defends the weak and vulnerable against Chaos—a force so powerful that normal human beings cannot possibly fight against it. The innocent and defenseless need a hero. As *Three Hearts and Three Lions* unfolds, Holger realizes that his mere presence in this alternate universe thwarts the advance of Chaos. The aging Magister Magici Martinus Trismegistus of Tarnberg explains to Holger that as “a warrior whom God gave more than common gifts…[He] put under a more than common burden.” Americans, like Holger, could not sit on the sidelines as godlessness and darkness engulfed the world. Indeed, Morgan Le Fey and the wizard Martinus inform him that he is at the “crux” of the battle. Although he chafes against the thought that his

26 Ibid., 130.


28 Ibid., 104, 138.
destiny makes him no more than a chess piece in a larger conflict, he soon recognizes that he must play his role to the end, as would any man with a conscience, any “guy who had to live with himself.”29 He cannot step aside and let Chaos overrun the land of men, no more than Americans of the 1950s could step aside and watch the Soviet Union spread communism around the globe.

In *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, Chaos looms on the horizon as a literal dark cloud. The Faerie Folk of the Middle World “‘canna endure broad daylight, so ’tis forever twilit in their realm,’” explains Alianora, the swan maid who accompanies Holger on his quest. She continues, “‘If Chaos wins, mayhap yon dusk will be laid on the whole world, and no more o’ bricht sunshine and green leaves and blossoms….’”30 In Anderson’s fantasy universe, this gloom rises in the east “like a vague wall”31 pointing indirectly, if not explicitly, to a threat most contemporary Americans would recognize, also rising in the east. Eastern Europe lay shrouded in shadow, behind an Iron Curtain where communism and tyranny had taken hold.

Similarly, the emerging threat of nuclear annihilation loomed over US culture during the early days of the Cold War. In 1950s political rhetoric, communism and the Soviet threat endangered all races’ freedom merely by existing. In Anderson’s fantasy world, as in 1950s America, the conflict is a “terrestrial reflection of the spiritual conflict between heaven and hell”32 in which the souls of mortals are the trophies of war. Chaos

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 36.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 27.
threatens to enslave those who support Law and to contaminate the human world with dark magic. Chaos, like the Soviet Union, threatens life, as Americans knew it in 1950.

Like the global political situation in the 1950s, in *The Broken Sword*, allies and forces line up on both sides of a war between two ancient races. Just as conflicts around the globe after World War II became proxies for the battle between the two newly-born superpowers, the battle between trolls and elves represents a battle between two conflicting pantheons of gods.

Throughout the story, Anderson plants evidence that the trolls and elves are chess pieces in a much larger conflict. When the witch who seduces Valgard calls on the “Prince of Darkness, Evil Companion”\(^\text{33}\), Anderson intends for the reader to believe that it is the Devil with whom she is in league. However, the witch is a pawn of a more powerful being. Instead of the Prince of Darkness, the god who answers her call and agrees to aid her in getting revenge for the murder of her family is Odin, one of the most important and powerful gods of the Norse pantheon. To what end, the witch does not know, but the hint that Odin has taken an interest in the affairs of Skafloc and Valgard does not bode well for them or their families.

The elves also fear the gods’ interest in their war with the trolls, when the messenger of the Æsir delivers the broken *Tryfing* sword as a gift on Skafloc’s naming day; “The elf-folk stood very still, for they knew the Æsir had some purpose of their own in this.”\(^\text{34}\) When all has come to naught, and Odin comes to claim the baby born of Freda’s and Skafloc’s incest, he reveals the Byzantine alliances and complex


\(^{34}\) Ibid., 12.
machinations in the “game between Æsir and Jötuns and the new gods” that Skafloc, Valgard, and Tryfing have been a part. Odin and the other supernatural powers of the universe have manipulated Skafloc, Freda, Valgard, Orm, and the witch as instruments in a war among Æsir, Jötuns, and the White Christ. Odin explains:

…Tryfing still gleams on the chessboard of the world. Thor broke it lest it strike at the root of Yggdrasil; then I brought it back and gave it to Skafloc because Bolverk, who alone could make it whole again, would never have done it for As or elf. The sword was needed to drive back the trolls—whom Utgard-Loki had been secretly helping—lest Alfheim be overrun by a folk who are friendly to the foemen of the gods. But Skafloc cannot be let keep the sword, for that which is in it will make him seek to wipe out the trolls altogether; and this Jötuns dare not allow, so they would move in, and the gods would have to move against them, and the doom of the world would be at hand. Skafloc must fall, and this child whom I wove my web to have begotten and given to me must one day take up the sword and bear it to the end of its weird.\(^{35}\)

The god’s convoluted reasoning reads like a recap of the moves and countermoves that U.S. and Soviet forces have made in an effort to avoid directly confronting each other’s very dangerous nuclear fangs. As in Anderson’s readers’ consensus reality, smaller, less powerful nations fight as proxies, because a battle among the supreme beings (the world’s superpowers) would bring about the end of the world itself. Like the patrons of client states around the globe, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union manipulated nations for their own ends, neither side could be allowed to advance its cause unchecked. As Odin’s words make clear, all the parties in the war between elves and trolls are mere pawns on a larger chessboard in a game in which super powers wield enough nuclear weaponry to destroy the world.

professor of broadcast journalism, and Theodore Otto Windt, Jr., former professor of political rhetoric at the University of Pittsburgh, write, “America had no choice but to respond…to the ‘communist threat,’” anywhere it occurred around the globe. Political leaders insisted that the “Soviet Union could at any time choose to end the threat by acting like a civilized nation.”36 By characterizing the Soviet Union as an uncivilized nation, creating an environment in which anticommunism became the “all-encompassing rhetoric of the culture, culminating in McCarthyism,”37 and a very hot war fought over communist expansion in South Korea, the message bombarding Americans about Soviet/communist Otherness justified the escalating arms race and the very real belief that nuclear arms would prevent future wars. Like Skafloc, because they believed the cause to be just, Americans contemplated the unthinkable—wielding nuclear weapons.

According to Stephen Whitfield, Max Richter professor of American civilization at Brandeis University, by the time the United States began its “police action” in Korea, an August 1950 Gallup Poll “found that 28 percent of those queried were in favor of dropping the atomic bomb in Korea, where war had erupted two months earlier.”38 Among them was U.S. Senator Margaret Chase Smith who, when interviewed about peace talks with the North Korean Communist leaders, “suggested that the United States should ‘drop the atomic bomb on [those] barbarians.’”39 For Smith, North Korea’s


37 Ibid., xviii.


39 Ibid., 6.
communist government was so far beneath our national contempt as to be unworthy of engaging in negotiation. Furthermore, according to Whitfield, both the U.S. president, Dwight Eisenhower, and his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, believed that, due to the fact that the Soviet Union and communism posed such an undeniable threat to the United States, negotiation was useless. The only thing the Soviets would understand was the threat of total annihilation, and brinkmanship was born.

To the frustration of U.S. policy makers, American security efforts were crippled because of the international taboo in the scientific and political communities against using nuclear weapons.\(^4^0\) U.S. leaders’ willingness to threaten the use of nuclear weapons against North Korea reveals that the communist nation itself, its people, its resources, and its culture had become so contemptible to them as to be selected for extermination. By equating communism with evil itself, American leaders turned the Soviet Union and its satellites states into the evil Other and began a decades long division of the world into Us and Them.

In *The Broken Sword*, Anderson deftly mirrors the consensus reality’s sense of ferocity and viciousness in dealing with the enemy, but also subverts the argument for stockpiling nuclear weapons. Only a weapon so fear inspiring and dreadful as *Tryfling* could defend the elves from demon-like trolls who “hated sunlight,” and who prepared for war despite a declared peace.\(^4^1\) However, dread hovers around the name-day gift the Æsir gave to Skafloc. Every creature and being Skafloc encounters reacts negatively to his decision to order the giant Bolverk (whose name means “evil-worker) to re-forge the

\(^{4^0}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{4^1}\) Ibid., 85, 82.
sword. On the journey to the giants’ mountain stronghold, horses shy, magical creatures recoil, and even Bolverk warns that the sword’s re-forging signals the “evening of the world.” Americans living under the threat of nuclear annihilation understood, all too well, Anderson’s universe.

Skafloc heeds no one’s advice about the dangers of wielding Tryfing. He carries the sword through battle after battle, mowing down his enemies: “He scattered death as a sower strews grain, and wherever he went the troll lines broke.” When at last he has decimated the troll horde, he faces his doppelganger, Valgard. In the end, Valgard and Skafloc both die by the sword Tryfing. Anderson asserts that in wielding such a dangerous weapon there is no controlling the destruction. Americans understood instantly, “An evil is being waked….”

In addition, Anderson’s use of the doppelganger imagery offers a further message that would have been difficult for American’s to hear at the time. When wielding the ultimate weapon in a senseless battle to the death, the United States could claim no moral superiority to the Soviet Union. As Valgard and Skafloc battle one another, the truth becomes obvious: as mirror images of one another their goals and weapons are indistinguishable. As Americans and the Soviets faced each other, prepared to destroy the world through nuclear war, they too represent mirror images of one another. Because ultimately neither side can survive such a war, their motivations for destroying one

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42 Ibid., 143, 146, 160.
43 Ibid., 204.
44 Ibid., 204, 205.
another, and the rest of the world along with them, mean nothing. By asserting their own interests over the interests of all others, and because such a war is senseless, in the end, the United States and the Soviet Union represent the same evil, and violate Kant’s demand that one act only in such a way that one’s actions could be used as a model for others.46

Communism and Fear at Home

In the 1950s, the demonization of U.S. enemies translated into an unwillingness to negotiate or compromise with communists in either the domestic or international political arena. This intransigence concerning ideological difference led to a stifling of political discourse that silenced any dissent, communist and anti-communist alike.47 Such an environment made neutrality suspect,48 and Americans found that rights guaranteed under the Constitution did not apply to communists or their sympathizers.49 In this supercharged atmosphere of suspicion in which “anyone might be a communist, and any communist in government might be a traitor,”50 the fear of communists reached a fevered pitch in domestic politics as well. In 1950 The Internal Security Act, passed over President Truman’s veto, established “concentration camps in Pennsylvania, Florida,


49 Ibid., 12.

50 Ibid., 31.
Oklahoma, Arizona (two) and California” to isolate American communists. Other legislation required the “registering of all communists and communist fronts.”

The looming threat of nuclear war and mutual assured destruction fed the ever-spreading anxiety that could not be named. Underneath that anxiety, in the United States, a growing fear of those who were different festered. Unfortunately, those who lived and worked side-by-side, shared that fear of one another. With the increased tension between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. on the international stage, domestic fears boiled over in the form of investigations by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee of the U.S. Congress. According to Whitfield, “anti-communism became an addiction” among political elites and intellectuals. Despite the saber rattling in headlines and government witch-hunts, the Communist Party in the United States remained a minor actor in political events.

In *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, Anderson draws on the fears raised by the geopolitical situation of the world at the time to illustrate the nature of the conflict Holger faces. Like the battle between communist tyranny and American democracy, the battle

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51 Ibid., 49.

52 Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 50. Evidence of Americans succumbing to the pressure to conform and to demonize anyone associated with communism can be found in the dwindling numbers of Americans who identified themselves as Communist or sympathetic to Communist ideas. While it is difficult to pinpoint actual numbers of “card-carrying-members,” at its founding in 1919, the Communist Party boasted approximately 44,000 members. The numbers declined precipitously after the establishment of the U.S.S.R and the rise to power of Joseph Stalin with the number of Communist party membership falling immediately after the United States’ entrance into the Second World War. Nevertheless, Communist Party membership fluctuated between seven thousand and an all-time high of 100,000 in 1939. For an interesting discussion of the number of Americans who identified themselves as affiliated with the Communist Party in the U.S., see Guenter Lewy, *The Cause that Failed: Communism in American Political Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), Appendix: Communist Party Membership, 1919-1988, 307-308. Lewy asserts that most of the numbers are exaggerations and do not “distinguish between recruited, registered, and dues-paying members, the last category being the smallest.”
between the free folk and their enemies was rooted not in political outlook or opinion, but on a fundamentally different way of being in the world. Anderson writes:

. . . [A] perpetual struggle went on between primeval forces of Law and Chaos. No not forces exactly. Modes of existence? A terrestrial reflection of the spiritual conflict between heaven and hell?….Under Law all men would live in peace and order and that liberty which only Law could give meaning. But this was so alien to the Middle Worlders that they were forever working to prevent it and to extend their own shadowy dominion.53

The enemies of human freedom, and by extension, Chaos, held different assumptions about the world. Liberty, it would seem, was as alien to Middle Worlders as it was to the Soviet Union. For Law and America to thrive, Chaos and the Soviet Union must be defeated.

Anderson’s work reflects still other social issues that Americans of the 1950s grappled with as well, further indicating how the Other was demonized by mainstream culture at the time. An examination of the domestic conditions of a nation turning inwards, defining anew what a nation founded on principles of equality and freedom looks like, reveals significant cracks in the veneer of American unity and justice.

American Suburbanization, Civil Rights and the Demonization of the Other

Probably the most widespread perception concerning United States demographics during the post-World War II years revolves around population growth (the “Baby Boom”) and suburbanization. As families from dense urban centers moved to communities adjacent to and closely tied with cities, the demographic profile of the United States changed. Immediately following World War II, populations were concentrated in major cities as returning World War II veterans (male and female)

married and started families. The 1950 U.S. Census counted 151.3 million Americans, and for the first time in U.S. history, more people lived in metropolitan areas than nonmetropolitan areas. Furthermore, the nation added 19 million people during the 1940s, and the pressure to provide affordable housing for this growing population had built steadily. For many, the answer to urban overcrowding came in the form of the growing suburban communities adjacent to major metropolitan areas. According to a 1999 Government Accounting Office report, “By 1950, the rate of growth nationally was 10 times higher in the suburbs than in the central cities.” A combination of “social, economic, demographic and technological factors” contributed to this rapid suburban growth. The rise in automobile purchases, the changing racial/ethnic composition of the urban population, and the availability of cheaper, more spacious homes outside the city centers spurred the movement of families to the communities in what came to be known as suburbs.


55 Nonmetropolitan area is defined by the census as rural areas or regions with no central urban nucleus of 250,000 or more people.


59 Ibid.

Prior to the 1950s large groups migrated from rural areas to the urban centers and account for the dramatic changes that occurred in metropolitan areas all across the industrialized north. An influx of African Americans from the deep South to the northern cities increased the raw numbers of “non-white” populations in metropolitan areas while simultaneously pushing white populations to the suburbs. Speculation about the reason for this “white-flight” includes factors as broad as the desire for more room, the perception of declining cities, the deterioration of urban schools, and racism.\footnote{See for example: Frey, "Central City White Flight; Leah Platt Boustan, "Was Postwar Suburbanization 'White Flight'? Evidence from the Black Migration," Quarterly Journal of Economics 125, no. 1 (February, 2010): 417-443; Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Stahura, Suburban Development, Black Suburbanization.} No matter the reason, as white middle-class families poured into newly created bedroom communities, an important change took place in the way Americans perceived themselves and the Other.

Formerly, the populations of the cities had been characterized as racially and ethnically diverse. As white families fled, more African Americans and Hispanic Americans moved in, changing the demographics and making cities more racially homogenous. Although “non-white” citizens\footnote{Hollman, Population Estimates, 9. The 1950 census used this term to refer to groups as diverse as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Biracial Americans. The U.S. population consisted of 89.3 % white, 9.9% Black, and 0.7% Hispanic with other races making up less than 1% of the population as well.} represented less than 12 percent of the U.S. population in 1950,\footnote{Hobbs, Demographic Trends, 74.} the population of the cities grew increasingly less Euro-centric and more segregated. Additionally, by 1950, 73.3% of the African American population
in the United States lived in areas defined as “non-rural.” This was a major change in African American living conditions as more and more former sharecroppers and descendants of former slaves fled the Jim Crow laws of the segregated South.

Between 1950 and 1960, as the United States saw an increase in the percentage of Americans living in the suburbs, the vast majority of those who moved out of the cities were white. This demographic data, specifically the racial make-up of the suburbs, meant that fewer and fewer Americans were coming into contact with those who differed from themselves racially, economically, or in matters of faith. Suburban communities became “insulated,” offering no “social and cultural diversity.” Tools such as community covenants prohibiting the sale of houses to Jews, and the denial of loans to African Americans, Latinos, and Asians, demarcated white-only, or Christian-only zones in the exploding suburban housing market, preventing people of color or of other faiths from participating in the new housing boom.

This distance reinforced a homogenized Euro-centric, “white, middle class world-view” among the suburban population encouraging a rigid definition of family and of what America looked like. Popular television shows, such as *Father Knows Best* (1954-1963) and *Leave it To Beaver* (1957-1963), modeled a Euro-centric American ideal,

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65 Metropolitan areas were defined at the time as “a large population nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of social and economic integration with that nucleus. See Frey, "Central City White Flight.”


effectively making invisible anyone who deviated from the heterosexual, nuclear family, Christian norm. Despite this homogenized popular image of America, the suburbs changed American families and communities. As English Department Chair at the University of Arizona, Leerom Medovoi explains in Rebels: Youth and The Cold War Origins of Identity, the suburbs created spaces in which the “ideal” family became one dominated by a male breadwinner, a dependent woman, and their children living under one roof. This development contributed to the disintegration of intergenerational households that had previously been the mainstay of many ethnically diverse urban communities.

The flight of workers from urban centers left the inner cities to the urban poor. Rapid Euro-American depopulation of the cities contributed to the decline of city centers as more and more unemployed, unemployable, or undervalued Americans moved into urban spaces. As Pulitzer Prize–winning author and journalist Isabel Wilkerson points out in her account of the Great Migration of African Americans from the South, The Warmth of Other Suns, the failure of mostly white landlords to invest in their properties contributed to the decline of urban environments. Underinvestment drove out white renters leaving “dilapidated” properties as the only spaces available to the newly arrived former sharecroppers from the South.68

Another factor that contributed to the impression that Americans were universally white, middle-class, Christian, and heterosexual, was what Medovoi calls “Fordism” – the process by which industrial production shifted in the postwar era to feed civilian

consumption, which created the demand for “ownership of a home, at least one automobile, a television set, refrigerator, washer and dryer and much more.” Moreover, as Kenneth Jackson, the Jacques Barzun Professor in History and the Social Sciences at Columbia University points out in his award winning history of the era, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States, the suburbs were characterized by “low density [populations]…architectural similarity…monotony and repetition.” Affordable housing with all the modern conveniences was readily available, but was accompanied by “economic and racial homogeneity.” By moving to the suburbs, white Americans of all ethnicities chose homogeneity over diversity. Suburban “sameness” reinforced the definition of America as seen on TV.

Living conditions in Poul Anderson’s novels mirror and reinforce the choice to live in homogenous enclaves. In Three Hearts and Three Lions humans live apart from the residents of Faerie and the forces of Chaos, largely out of fear of a perceived threat to their lives and lifestyle, but also out of the desire to avoid the taint of living close to those who use sorcery even to the point of excluding those who would side with them against Chaos. In The Broken Sword, humans avoid the elf-hills where magic sometimes causes cows to climb onto rooftops and bells to chime in their steeples or gold to rain from the

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69 Medovoi, Rebels, 18.
71 Ibid., 241.
72 Anderson, Three Hearts and Three Lions, 83, 103.
Living apart from those who are different, among those with whom one shares not only cultural ties but also a common nature, became the norm, even in fantasy worlds.

Nevertheless, American society at the time was far from homogenous or centered in the suburbs. The 1950s actually represent the awakening of very complex, often contradictory movements in American history. The image of conformity fails to take into consideration the growing visibility of many “non-conforming” groups—groups whose identity, activities, and very existence contradict the images portrayed in American pop-culture. The 1950s saw growing African American, feminist, and gay activist movements, along with intellectual resistance to investigations of dissenters by Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in Congress. Also during the 1950s, Americans of all walks of life, of all races, religions, and sexual preferences began asserting their relevance in American culture. These movements offer a glimpse at how the Other was perceived in an era often portrayed as a period of conformity and containment.

In her book, *Homeward Bound: American Families In Cold War Era*, Elaine Tyler May, 2015 Guggenheim fellow and historian at the University of Minnesota, unites the study of “public policy and political ideology” with a look at the way politics, both local and global, influences the private lives of American citizens. According to May, despite the image of the male breadwinner happily going off to work from the suburban enclaves of modern America, an undercurrent of malaise and discontent accompanied the

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74 Ibid., 18.

75 Medovoi, *Rebels*, 50.

men on their daily commute back and forth into the city for white-collar jobs. Such jobs transformed them into cogs in the wheel of progress, or “automatons.” Professor of History at Columbia University Alan Brinkley explains:

…[Men] were pressured to dress alike, to adopt similar values and goals, and habits, to place high value on ‘getting along’ within the hierarchical structure of the corporation….It was creating alienated conformists afraid to challenge prevailing norms; people who would take no risks; people who feared to be different.  

Americans in the postwar economic expansion felt pressured to “go along” and relax in their newly earned domesticity and leisure, just as Holger and Skafloc are lured into complacency by the forces of Chaos or the allure of Elfheim. Anderson’s stories cast a cautious eye at the enticements that the comforts and conformity of suburbia offered, subverting the common perception that all was well in the suburbs. Unlike the suburban adult male of the time, Holger and Skafloc exercise considerable autonomy over their lives, setting up a contrast between the lives of middle class suburban male and the fantasy world that could not be ignored. Anderson contrasts his readers, “other directed, ‘organization men,’ caught in a mass, impersonal white-collar world…[that] forced middle-class men into deadening, highly structured peer interactions,”  

with the purposefulness and power of his protagonists. Suburban life offered them little to no autonomy over their lives or creativity in their daily experiences, which stifled individuality. Anderson’s protagonists’ autonomy directly subverts the conditioned conformity in which most middle class men lived.  

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77 Brinkley, Rethinking Cold War Culture, 70.

78 May, Homeward Bound, 21-22.

79 Brinkley, ”The Illusion of Unity,” 71.
For women, too, the suburbs stifled creativity and circumscribed dreams of careers and independence. As Jackson writes, “The suburban world was a female world, especially during the day…. [T]heir isolation from work opportunities and from contact with employed adults led to stifled frustration and deep psychological problems.” The problems white American men and women suffered were only the tip of the iceberg, however.

**The Suppression of the Other**

At the same time that Americans faced growing pressure to conform to an idealized image of what it meant to be American, those who did not match that image began to exert pressure on the American conscience. Not all Americans could count on equal treatment in access to jobs, public services, freedom of movement, expression of their political opinions, or how they behaved in the privacy of their homes. Specifically, a growing culture of homophobia emerged in this era of “manly men” and docile females. The hunt for subversives in government saw gay men as “security risks,” and they were summarily dismissed from federal government jobs. In the American subconscious, homosexuality became equated with treason. According to anticommunists and security theory at the time, “gay men in that homophobic era were vulnerable to blackmail.”

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80 Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 243-44.

81 May, *Homeward Bound*, 94.


because of a belief that they would do anything to hide their sexual status, including revealing state secrets to the enemy.

Similarly, women who did not conform to the domestic ideal also became suspect. Tomboy-ism became equated with lesbianism. Women and girls who eschewed the paths laid out for them in the suburban homestead—domesticity and motherhood—and instead chose to compete with men in professional roles or rejected the proscription against sexual relationships outside of marriage, were demonized as a threat to the American way of life. “Nonmarital sexual behavior in all its forms” was considered depraved, degenerate, and weak. From the earliest days of the Red Scare, those considered outside the white, middle-class, heterosexual, monogamous norm were not only considered threats to the American ideal, but also obvious risks to American security and safety.

As an example of the way fantasy literature reinforces the social norms of an era, Anderson seems to uphold American values that proscribed female sexual activity outside of marriage. Three Hearts and Three Lions offers evidence regarding how unchecked female sexuality threatened American security through the female characters who act on Chaos’ behalf. Morgan Le Fey, Meriven, an elf maid, and Rusel, a water nixie, directly transgress against the sexual mores of the time by aggressively distracting Holger, using sex as a lure.

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84 Whitfield, Culture of the Cold War, 621; May, Homeward Bound, 160.
85 Medovoi, Rebels, 49.
86 May, Homeward Bound, 94.
Morgan Le Fey’s very presence exemplifies the idea that seductive, aggressive, powerful women are dangerous. Hugi’s horrified reaction to Holger’s announcement that he has seen this notorious queen expresses Anderson’s purpose. He says, “[T]here’s deviltry abroad for fair… She’s the michtiest witch in Christendie or heathendom….I’m no gleeful to be under ane roof wi’ her.”

Associated in popular imagination with the downfall of Arthur and Camelot, and an image that would mean even more to Americans with the election as president of John F. Kennedy a few years later, Anderson employs Morgan as the embodiment of an evil female.

Morgan represents Chaos’ mightiest tool against Holger. More than once Morgan attempts to seduce Holger to keep him out of the coming battle. Anderson supports the prevailing societal view that sexual relations outside of marriage are destructive, and sexually aggressive women are dangerous by having sexually aggressive women ensnare his male characters. It is Morgan, who drips of evil as she “emerges from the darkness itself,” who has “pale perfect features, feline grace of movement, [and] a body with more curves than a scenic highway” that Holger must guard against in order to fulfill his role as Law’s defender.

Anderson further equates the seductive female with evil as Morgan admits to being “allies” with “demons and their prophets…who have preached an uncouth religion [of cannibalism].” Morgan denies responsibility for Chaos’s activities, while coyly

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88 Ibid., 136.
89 Ibid., 68.
90 Ibid., 136.
acknowledging that the forces with whom she is working commit atrocities. Anderson’s perspective is clear. Men must be ever-vigilant when it comes to beautiful women. Any one of them could threaten not only their Christian homes, but the nation as well.

Similarly, in *The Broken Sword*, three besotted men fall under the spell of beautiful women, causing the downfall of themselves, their families, and their communities: Skafloc and Freda commit incest and Valgard and his brother succumb to the wiles of a witch disguised as a beautiful and sexually predatory female whose only goal is to destroy their family in an act of revenge.91 Within minutes of meeting the curvaceous witch in disguise, Valgard slays his brother with his ax and hides the crime. Anderson’s message, once again, is clear, female sexuality is dangerous. It drives men to perform hideous, unspeakable crimes. Women, especially beautiful, powerful women, cannot be trusted. They have insidious and predatory designs on men and by associating them with Holger’s enemy Anderson asserts that America’s enemies are capable of the most unspeakable crimes; crimes that included cannibalism, incest, fratricide, and murder.

Anderson also warns of un-checked power or ambition. In the opening sequence of *The Broken Sword*, the reader witnesses the crime committed by the Berzerker Orm, Skafloc’s father, which motivates the witch to seek revenge against Valgard and Skafloc’s family. When Orm decides to settle down and begin a family, he murders the witch’s family because her husband would not sell his land to him.92 Although the description of the crime consists of one paragraph, the curse the witch casts on Orm gives rise to all that befalls him and his family. This information offers additional insight into

92 Ibid., 2.
Anderson’s perspective about American ambitions in the world. By suggesting that, while Americans businesses and economic interests expanded, the crimes committed in the name of Manifest Destiny and U.S. hegemony, might in some way be responsible for the trouble the nation faced. Greed, brute force, and a failure to play by accepted standards of behavior often come back to haunt those who succumb to these vices.

Anderson’s novel seems, on the surface, to support some aspects of American culture, the proscription against female sexual aggressiveness, for example. In other ways, the novel subverts American rhetoric concerning its role in protecting the weak or fighting for freedom.

Furthermore, the portrayal of women in Anderson’s novels offers yet another glimpse behind the façade of suburban conformity of 1950s American culture. In contrast to Morgan le Fay, who uses sex as a weapon, Anderson depicts Alianora, the steadfast, pretty-but-plain, hero-worshipping maid with “gray-eyes and brown tresses,” as the proper object of Holger’s affection.² Alianora embodies the era’s model of American womanhood: vulnerable, but capable, attractive, steadfast, and adoring. Holger, and every man for that matter, must protect and provide for this docile female, even as she tolerates a man’s wondering eye. In *The Broken Sword*, Anderson depicts Freda as a beautiful but pure, unknowing victim of her crime of incest. An adherent of the new religion of the White Christ, she flees her crime and the luxuries of Alfheim, escaping to the barren, comfortless human world. Although she suffers, losing her soul and her child in the process of atoning for her sin, Freda, Anderson seems to imply, is blameless: a mere tool used by Odin to carry out his plan against the Jötuns. Anderson sounds a warning: he

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who succumbs to female charms and unfettered female sexuality becomes a pawn of evil. Anderson’s story confirms that those who do not conform to the American standards of appropriate feminine appearance and behavior threaten hearth and heart, as well as national security.

How American society defined what it meant to be American rests at the center of the discussion of how Americans define the Other and how they are treated. The prohibition against thinking and expressing divergent opinions or living different lifestyles had a stifling effect on dialogue and the exchange of ideas, and silenced dissenting opinions, giving the impression of conformity. By ostracizing, or worse, stigmatizing and pathologizing those who disagreed with elite or official dogma, American Cold War culture forced conformity onto those who did not or would not conform to societal expectations. Remaining silent or presenting the impression of conformity were the only options left for those who acted, thought, or felt different.94

**The Civil Rights Movement**

Anderson’s works, like many of the works I address in this thesis, portray two fundamentally different groups of people at war with one another. In addition, the question of social and political power and its abuse surfaces as a major concern in his novels as he subtly asserts that mainstream American self-satisfaction with its way of life was itself an abuse of power. His works illuminate the treatment and marginalization of the Other by making them visible.

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America’s “containment” mentality permeated its responses to communism and anyone whose lifestyle or appearance did not fit the official “All-American” image of white, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian suburbia as portrayed on popular television and in the media. Many groups who did not match that image of America chafed against their marginalization. For African Americans—adults, children and teenagers—harassment or verbal attacks were the norm if they attempted to be served at lunch counters, ride unmolested on buses, or go to classes in previously segregated schools. They were legally marginalized, beaten, threatened, and murdered without reprisal (as in the case of Emmett Till and the numerous incidents of the lynching of African Americans during the era).95 The message broadcast about the Other, as transmitted by these efforts to silence African American social justice efforts or deny them and other segments of the population equal membership in the society, contributed to the already widely spread narrative of the time that the Other threatened white, middle class, Christian society. That message included the imperative that these threats must be eradicated, isolated, or squashed.

In *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, Hugi, Holger’s dwarf guide, serves as a stand in for the invisible segments of American society at the time of Anderson’s writing. Hugi and other “member[s] of nonhuman race[s]”96 Holger encounters, cook, clean, and wait on the humans and Faeries throughout the story. Hugi sleeps in the stable with the horses. Anderson’s dwarfs are treated the way African Americans of the era were; they were routinely turned away from hotels, restaurants, and commercial establishments, and

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95 Again, Wilkerson’s work offers insight into the effect of Jim Crow on individuals and the burgeoning civil rights movement during this era.

96 Ibid., 34.
suffered other degradations as Wilkerson describes in *Warmth of Other Suns*. American society assigned minorities a status so inferior to the white norm that they were seen as, not only invisible, but less than human. Hugi’s thick accent, and slow, uneducated style stands in stark contrast to Holger and other humans whose appearance reflect a Euro-centric preference even in this alternate universe.

As the story unfolds Holger begins to recognize that Chaos threatens all peoples of the alternate world. Anderson makes clear that Holger is the Defender “to all,”97 not only of the human race. As Holger rides to find the legendary sword *Cortana*, Magister Martinus tells him, “God be with you. God be with you, for I think you ride on behalf of us all.”98 Martinus’s comment, on the surface, speaks to the threat from Chaos, Anderson’s image of Soviet domination, but a subtler idea emerges as well. Those who stand for Law, must defend even the least of the society’s members, no matter their nature, or what they look like. Martinus’s injunction is a call for the hero, and by extension white American society, to take notice of the treatment of the Other in America, those who are abused, marginalized and treated unjustly. Anderson does not gloss over Holger’s obligation to Hugi and those like him.

Throughout *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, Anderson carefully constructs an image of Law as representing justice, order, and freedom. “Decent humanity,” Holger reasons, “would always want to strengthen and extend Law, safety, predictability,”99 especially for those who are powerless in the face of their foes. While the forces of

97 Ibid., 158.


99 Ibid., 67.
Chaos, on the other hand would seek to “break down…order: to restore some primeval state where anything could happen.”

Chaos threatens the lifestyle established by “decent humanity.” But as the humans Holger meets abuse Hugi, kicking him with disdain and dismissing his testimony as the words of a “misshapen manikin,” in stark contrast to the way he and the swan maiden, Alianora, are treated, Anderson calls attention to the fact that justice and equality are not guaranteed to those considered Other. For Anderson, American injustice toward those outside the white mainstream makes white Americans just as culpable for injustice as those who commit “archaic horrors that civilized men had once believed were safely dead.”

While Anderson’s allusions overtly refer to the “monstrous” Nazis and the atheistic Soviet Union, his condemnation of Chaos also alludes to other atrocities. Americans increasingly witnessed on television and in newspapers atrocities resulting from the Jim Crow South and the abuses of those whose political opinions and sexual preference were outside the mainstream. Anderson warns of “archaic horrors”—the spread of hate, repression, and violent crimes against African Americans committed with impunity—that grew increasingly more overt as the 1950s progressed. In Anderson’s novel, Chaos’s victory would overturn some of human civilization’s strongest taboos. Enemies of Law, including segregationists, anti-communist witch-hunters, and those who

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid., 91-92.

102 Anderson, Three Hearts and Three Lions, 67.

103 Maartje M. Abbenhuis and Sara Buttsworth, Monsters in the Mirror: Representations of Nazism in Post-War Popular Culture (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 179. Abbenhuis’s and Buttsworth’s discuss the way that Nazi Germany has “become an uncritical signifier of evil in western popular culture.” Ibid., xvii.
espoused anti-gay, anti-Jewish rhetoric, served Chaos’s goals. Anderson’s evil encompasses anyone who abuses power, oppresses the weak, or stands on the sidelines watching. As Hegel asserts, the individual must take responsibility for insuring that the community’s conduct conforms to the Gospel message. Holger models what that might look like in Anderson’s alternate universe.

In the final onslaught against the forces of Chaos, Holger reclaims the legendary sword Cortana, a blade made of the “same steel as [other famous swords] Joyeuse, Durindal and Excalibur,” and knowledge of his true identity returns to him. Holger Carlsen is the fabled Nordic hero, Ogier the Dane of medieval lore. Legend tells that Ogier “The Defender” sleeps, but in the hour of Denmark’s (and France’s) greatest need, the warrior will return and vanquish her enemies.

Holger smites the horde thrown against him by Chaos in the final battle at the Church of St. Grimmin’s-in-the-Wold and finds himself simultaneously battling on a beach in Denmark in 1943. In a final speech about what he has endured, Holger/Ogier offers the only scientific explanation he can for why he came back to the narrator’s universe. He says:

…Those two worlds—and many more, for all I know—are in some way the same. The same fight was being waged, here the Nazis and there the Middle World; but in both places, Chaos against Law, something old and wild and blind at war with man and the works of man. In both worlds it was the time of need for Denmark and France. So Ogier came forth in both of them, as he must…

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105 Ibid., 104.

106 Ibid., 160.
In Anderson’s tale, and in America, Anderson suggests, all people of decency must stand against the evil—the “something old and wild and blind at war with man.”

Conclusion

The decade of the 1950s represents a pivotal moment in United States and American literary history. The demographic shifts in the American population and the socio-political environment of the era reshaped culture for many decades. The expansion of suburban communities and the disintegration of urban centers caused increased segregation along racial and socio-economic lines. Suburban expansion also created an environment in which women and teenagers became non-working dependents in single family, male-dominated households. Furthermore, perceived threats from domestic communist sympathizers and Soviet Bloc expansion focused political tension on policies of “containment” of social and cultural movements that lay outside the white, Christian heterosexual mainstream.

All of these factors brought into stark focus the disparities between idealized American principles of freedom, equality, and Christian values, and the reality of strictly proscribed choices in both the political and sexual arena, as well as the torments of racial inequality. Anderson’s works reflect social and political realities of fear and suspicion that Americans would have recognized. In addition, by portraying Chaos as an evil force that threatens the underlying values of American life and culture, Anderson is able to refocus the message and suggest that those who would abuse the less powerful or marginalized are as evil as the forces that cast a dark shadow over Anderson’s fantasy.

107 Ibid.
worlds. These forces, he suggests, endanger the “‘bricht sunshine and green leaves and blossoms’”\textsuperscript{108} of human communities, and must not be ignored.

Through his two 1950s works of fantasy, Poul Anderson forces readers to take a close look at American notions of family, faith, community, personal responsibility, freedom, and justice. He portrays heroes whose actions are not always heroic, and calls attention to the fact that, “a warrior whom God gave more than common gifts…[He] put under a more than common burden.”\textsuperscript{109} Americans, Anderson seems to say, despite our faults and desire for rest after our long arduous fight in the 1940s, must guard against complacency. He adjures Americans not to rest while the struggle for liberty and democracy continues at home and abroad. In the 1950s world of conformity and conflict, Anderson’s tale of fear, oppression, hatred, and abuse of power subverts the image of America as a carefree content nation living out happy lives in the suburbs. Furthermore, read through the lens of increased tension between people of color and the mainstream culture in 2015 America, Anderson’s work remains relevant. Chaos in the form of international terrorism, gun violence, and the deaths of African Americans at the hands of the police continue to threaten Law and “civilized” society. From the perspective of 2015, Anderson’s stories demonstrate that the United States still has much to prove with respect to its claim of being the defender of freedom, democracy, and justice for all.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 36.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 103.
CHAPTER 6

THE 1960S: THE WORLD IT WAS A-CHANGING

Come writers and critics/ Who prophesize with your pen/ And keep your eyes wide/ The chance won’t come again/ And don’t speak too soon/ For the wheel’s still in spin/ And there’s no tellin’ who/ That it’s namin’. For the loser now/ Will be later to win/ For the times they are a—changin’.

Bob Dylan, “The Times They are a Changin’”

Following the tumultuous social and scientific upheavals of the previous decade, the 1960s in the United States saw the unraveling of the “illusion” of American cultural unity and prosperity. A new era of skepticism was born during a decade that disproved the notion that all Americans could participate in the American Dream. Racial discrimination, economic hardship, the continued closeting of those who lived outside the heterosexual norm, and the dawning of a new attitude about mainstream culture among youth brought Americans face to face with the danger of acquiescence to the cultural expectations represented by suburban expansion, the proliferation of white-collar jobs, and the dominance of heterosexual, male-dominated households. By the middle of the decade, this reevaluation led to the idolization of the rebellious on multiple cultural fronts—in music, literature, and political participation. However, the decade that saw the

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Civil Rights Act, the Summer of Love, and the British Invasion began on a much different note.

John F. Kennedy’s election as the 35th President of the United States reflected a continued faith in American possibility. His election came on the heels of Soviet advances in space exploration, unprecedented growth in the United States military and armaments industry during peace time,\(^2\) and a wave of social change that emphasized youth culture. At the same time that Kennedy warned other nations that Americans would “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty,” he also asked Americans to share “in the great common task of bringing to man that decent way of life which is the foundation of freedom and a condition of peace.”\(^3\) With the establishment of the Peace Corp, which sent young volunteers to serve overseas, Kennedy asked Americans, especially young Americans, to shoulder the burdens of the world and work toward their resolution. Soon this burden would include dying in front of enemy guns in Southeast Asia, and the new optimism would be sorely tested. The Witch World fantasy series by Andre Norton reflects the confusion and faltering commitment to absolute victory over communism that Kennedy’s administration promised. Like the 1960s in America, the series begins with a commitment to defeating evil and ends with the recognition that


mutual withdrawal and balance are the best that can be hoped for between enemies whose ways of life are mutually antagonistic.

Both American and the young president’s resolve to preserve peace and work toward freedom would face severe tests during Kennedy’s short term in office. As the nation lurched from one crisis to another, including the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Civil Rights movement, assassinations of President Kennedy, his brother Robert, Malcolm X, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the escalation of U.S. involvement in the Vietnamese conflict, and the rise of youth rejection of mainstream culture, Americans witnessed profound changes on all fronts. Norton’s Witch World fantasy series, written between 1963 and 1968, reflects these tumultuous changes. Her depiction of the enemy, the nature of the battle against them, and the response to that battle by characters in the novels mirror changing American attitudes at the time.

**Communism, Nuclear Weapons, and Using the Ultimate Weapon in Andre Norton’s Witch World Series**

The suspicion and fear generated by a decade of escalating threats in the nuclear arms race, economic rivalry, and expanding regional hegemony by both the U.S.S.R. and the United States, reinforced a strategy of containment as a mainstay of U.S. foreign policy throughout the 1960s. As the 1960s progressed, questions arose about whether containment was really the most effective means for confronting the Soviet threat as the U.S. government’s commitment to Just War doctrine took a step backwards when it came to the conflict. In 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower commissioned the Doolittle

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Committee to investigate the activities of the Central Intelligence Agency. In its findings the committee members warned that Americans might have to forego playing by “[h]itherto acceptable norms of human conduct.”

According to committee recommendations, such norms no longer applied to conflicts between two nations when one of the parties’ “avowed objective is world domination by whatever means and at whatever cost.” Accordingly, the Committee suggested that the United States “must develop effective espionage and counterespionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated, and more effective methods than those used against us.” As a result, presidents for the next three decades heightened the arms race, and expanded covert operations of the intelligence organization’s role in U.S. foreign policy. In international conflicts, henceforth, it would seem, the ends would justify the means.

To that end, one of Kennedy’s first official acts as president was to order the invasion of Cuba by forces secretly backed by the C.I.A. (originally authorized by Eisenhower). In the 1950s, the U.S. government had established its resolve to assert its interests by unseating democratically elected governments in Iran and Guatemala, and the Bay of Pigs invasion demonstrated to the world that communist nations weren’t the only ones willing to overthrow governments. Although Fidel Castro’s communist military forces summarily crushed the U.S.-backed invasion and the president suffered a setback

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6 Ibid.

in prestige, the true victim of the debacle was American idealism. As Senator William Fulbright had warned, the covert operation was “‘of a piece, with the hypocrisy and cynicism for which the United States is constantly denouncing the Soviet Union.’” The gloves were off and Americans had shown that they could play as dirty as the Soviets, ostensibly in order to preserve its freedom. Just such a scenario—two nations battling to the death, and using all means possible to defend themselves—plays out in Andre Norton’s Witch World series.

In her five books written between 1963 and 1968 (Witch World (1963), Web of the Witch World (1964), Three Against the Witch World (1965), Warlock of the Witch World (1967), and Sorceress of the Witch World (1968), Andre Norton tells the story of Simon Tregarth, Jaelithe, the witch with whom he falls in love, and their triplets, Kemoc, Kaththea, and Kyllan. In the series, each member of the family fights to preserve and defend their adopted lands in a battle pitting those who use the magical force called the Power for good and those who use it for evil purposes.

The opening chapter of the series finds Simon Tregarth coming to grips with the realization that he cannot escape assassins from an unnamed secret organization—one vaguely associated with his service in the U.S. military during World War II. In the “half-world” of violence, spies, warriors, and hit men, Tregarth has become a liability. The world where Norton’s series begins mirrors the reader’s own post-World War II reality of

8 Ibid., 174.

9 Throughout the series, Norton capitalizes the word Power when she writes of this force. In this chapter I will do so as well to differentiate between this magical force and power as a more general term.

fine hotels, luxurious steak dinners on cold rainy nights, and guns—“fangs” as Tregarth calls the weapon he caresses in his pocket—that are “smooth, sleek, deadly.”¹¹ When Dr. Jorge Petronius, a stranger to Tregarth but well known among the members of the organization for which he works, offers him help, the world of Norton’s series enters the realm of fantasy. Petronius promises Tregarth the chance to disappear without a trace. At the break of dawn following a night-long vigil, Tregarth seats himself on the “rounded depression” of the stone seat of the Siege Perilous, a legendary menhir that “was rumored to be able to judge a man, determine his worth, and then deliver him to his fate.”¹² In this first chapter, Norton taps the reader’s knowledge of Arthurian legend and invites them to accept the magic “rumored” to be associated with the ancient Siege Perilous.

As Simon waits on the legendary ancient bench, the urban landscape beyond the archway swirls and melts. Then, before him stretches “a moorland which lay under a gray dawn sky…[the landscape] drew him as nothing else ever had in his life…Without a word of farewell Simon arose and strode beneath the arch.”¹³ As with many portal fantasies Norton’s series begins in the consensus reality of the reader, building her story from realistic details that link the setting to the reader’s own world. She knows that in the back of the reader’s mind is hazy knowledge about covert government organizations of killers and guns. When Tregarth walks through the portal, Norton makes no attempt to explain what has happened. The magic is never questioned. Neither the reader nor the characters ever hesitate or wonder if the events in the story are really happening, or are a

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹² Ibid., 11.

¹³ Ibid., 15.
vision or a dream. Norton’s story engages the reader’s imagination in a compact between author and reader that whatever magical or marvelous elements he or she encounters have been included in order to enhance the reader’s experience rather than as mere fancy, as critic and Professor of Humanities at Chicago’s Roosevelt University author of Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature, Gary Wolfe, asserts.

Norton takes Simon and the reader into the Witch World governed by women who wield the Power. As Simon learns what the women’s magic involves, he realizes that he, too, has a rudimentary ability to manipulate the Power. He describes his efforts as a “focusing or intensifying of…will, imagination, and faith.” Once again, although a character attempts to explain the magic in violation of Tolkien’s admonition that the magic must never be questioned, Norton, like Poul Anderson, knows the audience for whom she writes. Americans in the age of science and modern advances need a reason to buy this strange Power that she presents. More important, however, Norton’s description of the Power as an exertion of will, imagination, and faith juxtaposes women’s Power with the cold technological tools of the witches’ enemy, the Kolder. In contrast to the mind-controlled machines the Kolder deploy to conquer the Witch World, the witches’ abilities appear natural and benevolent. This contrast reveals an emerging theme in Norton’s series, the dissonance between nature and technology. In the American consensus reality at the time, rural landscapes began disappearing under suburban tract


15 Norton, Witch World, 35.

housing as machines of all kinds—washing machines, automobiles, and communication technologies—became more and more prevalent in American life.

After passing through the Siege Perilous, Tregarth soon becomes aligned with the witches of Estcarp who are surrounded on all sides by those who find their magic a threat. Immediately, Norton links the reader to the 1960s context in the U.S. Although the Witches have a power that makes them stronger than their enemies, they are, like the United States, besieged by those who would destroy them.

In the original two books of the series, *Witch World* and *Web of the Witch World*, Simon joins Jaelithe, a witch, or a Wise Woman, and Koris, another foreigner who has come into Estcarp’s service. Together this company battles the mysterious forces of Kolder. In these two novels, Norton deploys numerous methods to paint the forces of Kolder with a sinister brush. She also uses language, imagery, and plot to represent them as alien, evil, and dangerous to freedom and honor. In this world, the Kolder threaten the very existence of all those they encounter. In recounting the tale of his own home’s invasion by the Kolder, Koris relates that when the “Kolder came to Gorm, Gorm ceased to be.” Norton offers few details about what occurred in Gorm, but the lack of information about Gorm’s fate would have reminded readers of the era of the fate of citizens of Eastern Europe walled off from Western nations by a newly built wall in Berlin. With the closing of Eastern Europe from the West, for all practical purposes, the people under communist control ceased to be. Communication, and contact of all kinds

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17 Ibid., 38.

18 The Berlin Wall and the no-man’s land between east and west Berlin was built in 1961 effectively dividing East from West for the next 29 years.
ended abruptly behind a wall which, as President Kennedy explained, kept “people in and freedom out.”\textsuperscript{19} By building on a fear and suspicion readers understood, Norton’s novel contributes new meaning to the discourse of complex meanings that Michel Foucault understood society to be. Norton uses American associations with Soviet tyranny to make the enemy in her story more sinister. Conversely, the association moves back through the text and brings new associations to the tyranny associated with the Berlin Wall.

Norton progressively reveals more concretely the nature of the threat Estcarp and others face from the “chill evil” of Kolder.\textsuperscript{20} In these first two novels, Norton builds on the experience of 1960s Americans to create an enemy who must be defeated at all cost. In her later books, discussed below, the enemy her characters face changes dramatically. Initially, in \textit{Witch World} and \textit{Web of the Witch World}, Norton portrays the Kolder as a nation that puts men, women, and children to death;\textsuperscript{21} “hunger for rule over all men;”\textsuperscript{22} and invades the lands of other worlds to find resources to manufacture their weapons of control and destruction and to capture men to enslave.\textsuperscript{23} In the heightened tension of 1960s America, the image of a rising threat to American and world security and freedom would have touched a nerve in American readers. Its resemblance to the looming threat of Soviet communism is unmistakable. Here, again, language and images from two

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\textsuperscript{22} Norton, \textit{Web of Witch World}, 104.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 128-30.
\end{flushleft}
realities, the novel’s and the reader’s, combine to construct and influence meanings in both. In addition, she begins to sketch a notion of evil for the reader that is part of a binary of good versus evil rooted in Luther and the tradition of Satan working through agents who prey on the innocent and weak.

Norton uses imagery that drives home the alien, evil nature of the Kolder when their forces ambush Koris, Jaelithe, and Simon. As the three lead Estcarp’s army to defend the Sulcar, an Escarp ally, the enemy army attacks. Norton writes: “Out of a cottony fog…burst the attack, a wave of armed and armored men coming forward at a run in utter silence…. [T]hey advanced without any call or orders along their ranks [adding] to the weirdness of the sudden sortie….”

Norton continues:

The Kolder force made no attempt at self-preservation. Man after man…went blindly to his death because he did not turn from attack to defense in time. There was no dodging, no raising of shield or blade to ward off blows. The foot soldiers fought with a dull ferocity, but it was almost mechanical. Clockwork toys, Simon thought, wound up and set marching.

The Kolder’s eerily unnatural silence during the battle and their utter failure to defend themselves points to something alien and inhuman about the enemy Estcarp faces. Norton’s description of the Kolder warriors as unthinking, machine-like soldiers matches American notions of the kind of horrific soldiers communism produced: automatons blindly following orders to destroy freedom in the West.

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25 Ibid., 47.

Finally, when the battle has ended and Jaelithe and Tregarth examine the fallen and dead, a cold dread descends on the group. One victim, still alive, stares back at Simon and Jaelithe with eyes that “did not focus…on the…two bending over him…The witch…cupped the man’s chin…peering into those unseeing eye. Then she loosed him and pulled away, wiping her hands vigorously on the coarse grass.…” To Simon the men they had fought had the look and feel of cold meat. Norton writes:

... [W]ith odd reluctance Simon...took the man’s head between his hands. And on that moment of contact he nearly recoiled. There was no human warmth in that flesh...; What lay there was not anything he had ever chanced upon before —an insane man still has the cloak of humanity; a mutilated or mangled body could awaken pity to soften horror. Here was the negation of all which was right, a thing so loathsome apart from the world that Simon could not believe it was meant to see sun or walk upon the wholesome earth. The Kolder forces, as the group encounters again and again, are mere “walking dead...captives sapped of soul, made to cup within their bodies some enlivening power which clean humanity shrank from.” The Kolder, in the ultimate violation of Kant’s imperative to treat no person as a means to an end, not only have transformed those they capture into tools for their own ends, but they have stripped them of humanity itself, making them into mere husks of human form. Here, brought to life, is a personification of the ultimate loss of freedom that Americans feared so strongly, and Kant deplored.

When a Kolder raiding party captures Tregarth, he witnesses for himself how far Kolder evil extends. On the slave vessel in which he is trapped he learns that the Kolder

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28 Ibid.


forces capture men with military training and mercenaries, all able-bodied and between the ages of “late teens to early thirties,” while the “[older and feeblere] men, women and children…[have] been put to death.”

Readers would have been as repulsed by this story as Simon. Stories such as these could have come straight from the headlines of the day. This echoes the tactics of the communist forces of North Vietnam, who were reported to murder and forcefully conscript non-combatants. In a foreign policy speech at Johns Hopkins University in April 1965, President Lyndon Johnson explained to the nation why America must fight in Vietnam, saying:

“…We fight because we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny. And only in such a world will our own freedom be finally secure…[The war in Vietnam] is a war of unparalleled brutality. Simple farmers are the targets of assassination and kidnapping. Women and children are strangled in the night….Small and helpless villages are ravaged by sneak attacks…terror strikes in the heart of the cities…”

The Kolder tactics spring from U.S. news headlines and television screens. Americans understood the horror and desperation of Estcarp’s battle against the Kolder. It was a battle for the very preservation of their way of life, for their lives, and the lives of their children. In addition, Norton associates the Kolder with an unspeakable evil working in the world, “riding the will” of a human for its own ends.

The Kolder ship carries Tregarth to their “nest” at Yle. There, Simon witnesses the process by which captives are transformed into the husks of men he fought on the

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battlefield. In the Kolder headquarters “Simon, with a swift jolt of pure fear” watches as, using a series of bottles and tubes inserted in veins, and a metal cap fitted to the head, a man is killed. He notes it is “not the death of a body, but that death which would reduce the body” to a mere husk of a human being. Here the Kolder create the automatons that fight without defending themselves. Simon, with horror, realizes he will be transformed next.

Norton once again contrasts alien technology with Simon’s humanity and the naturalness of the Power. The cold scientific details Norton uses to describe the procedures that turn men into weapons recall the gruesome scientific experiments conducted on prisoners by Hitler’s Third Reich in the Nazi extermination camps, and American prisoners of war returning home from communist prisons after the Korean conflict. Freed POWs reported their torture at the hands of their captors and attempts at brainwashing intended to turn them into instruments of communist propaganda. Showing that Estcarp’s enemies would exercise any means possible—including turning their victims into mindless drones—to achieve world domination, dramatized what America’s enemies could do. Even though the science of brainwashing was hardly the equivalent of Norton’s device, by drawing on American’s known experience with mind control she escalates the horror Americans felt about enemies who they knew used it.

Interestingly, several of the fantasy writers I examine rely on this image of human beings reduced to unseeing, mindless drones numb to injury or pain, blindly following the commands of an evil overlord. Images of human beings stripped of their individuality

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and free will and turned into weapons fracture sacrosanct articles of faith in the American belief system: freedom, self-determination, and individuality. Among the writers I examine, this is the motif’s first appearance. While Poul Anderson describes humans and trolls used in the service of evil masters or as pawns of the gods, those characters behave as independent agents and act according to their own will. Norton’s device is something entirely different. By employing this image, Norton and other writers connect new meaning to one of American society’s most interlaced and imbedded nodes of meaning in Foucault’s matrix of culture. This image sends heightened reverberations along underlying American ideas about its enemy.

In the Kolder headquarters, Tregarth survives through sheer strength of will. Tapping into his limited control of the Power, he manipulates the Kolder mind control system, turning it against the Kolder. Echoes of the Doolittle Commission’s injunction to use the tactics of our enemies against them draws Norton into new territory in her portrayal of evil. Here she begins to suggest, as she will in the later novels of the series, that we have become that which we despise. But in the first volume, Norton depicts a nation determined to defend itself at all costs—even at the cost of being tainted by using its enemy’s weapons.

Similarly, because of the high stakes for individual and national freedom, Norton portrays a people willing to make the ultimate sacrifice against its enemy: self-annihilation. Early in the battle against the Kolder, the Sulcarmen sacrifice their community to prevent its falling to the enemy. Describing the Kolder forces as “winged demons” because they managed to attack from the air, the Sulcar leader, Magnis Osberic vows to prevent the Kolder from enslaving the Sulcarmen: “[T]here is also an answer to
demons,” he exclaims. “Sulcarkeep shall not serve that spawn for a nesting place.”35 In a final desperate attempt to destroy the Kolder forces, Master Osberic unleashes his nation’s ultimate weapon. As Simon, Koris, Jaelithe, and their armies flee, the night is turned into day by an explosion that destroys the keep itself and all those within its walls. Simon, Koris, and Jaelithe witness the final brilliant ball of flames that signals the death of the Sulcar hold. Norton describes it this way:

. . . The sky, the sea about them, the coast behind were clear and bright. But when did the sun rise from the shore, leap up in sky-touching flames from a land base?...They were heading out to sea, leaving the source of that heat and light behind them…

[A] wind drove down upon them as if a hand strove to press them beneath the surface….36

The Sulcarmen’s sacrifice signals the belief that, for America, a loss of freedom was even more evil than death itself. In the 1960s, as nuclear warheads proliferated, this description of conflagration would have immediately called to mind images of nuclear mushroom clouds and mutual assured destruction. Norton plays on the fear and helplessness Americans felt in the face of nuclear warheads pointed at them from the Soviet Union. But more significantly, Norton offers the Sulcarmen as a comparison to world leaders who held their people hostage as collateral against death and nuclear war.

In the 1960s Americans would have recognized Estcarp’s war against the Kolder as a reference to the fight for human freedom and self-determination as it played out in Vietnam, Cuba and Eastern Europe which they witnessed in the pages of newspapers and on television sets across the nation. Andre Norton’s story reflects the fear of communist

35 Ibid., 62.
36 Ibid., 63-4.
incursion that was rampant at the time and led to an American commitment to stamp it out wherever it appeared. The battle against the Kolder in Norton’s Witch World paralleled the very real world battle between the American good and the communist evil.

As Jaelithe and Simon battle against the forces of Kolder, they come to realize that the Kolder themselves are in a fight for their existence. In the second volume of the series, *Web of the Witch World*, the leaders of the battle against the Kolder come to the conclusion that Estcarp would be best served by staying out of Kolder’s struggle for survival. As the protagonists gather at the gate through which the Kolder arrived in Witch World, a gate similar to the one Simon used, they witness the internal war between the Kolder who have escaped to Estcarp, and those who were left behind. Jaelithe tells Simon as follows:

> . . . Kolder fights for its life…[Those] who share that blood are using all weapons to their hands…And if we do not wish to be caught up in this struggle we must keep aloof. For Kolder fights that which is also Kolder…and this is no war such as our world has seen before.\(^{37}\)

In the battle of Kolder against Kolder, both sides deploy weapons of unprecedented destruction. As American involvement in Southeast Asia heated up in the early 1960s, an increasing number of military advisors sent to Vietnam and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution greatly expanded President Lyndon Johnson’s power to wage war in the region. Norton warns of the unprecedented destruction of modern warfare and the danger of entangling ourselves in other nations’ conflicts. The war in Vietnam would eventually become a quagmire that America would struggle over for another nine years. A total of

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211,000 Americans would die or suffer wounds in a war that was, ultimately, not America’s to fight.

As in Estcarp, the horrors the Vietnamese perpetrated against each other, as Johnson explained to Americans, were of “unparalleled brutality.” But worse, it would seem, is the notion that Norton hints at using the image of the doppelganger of Kolder fighting itself. She implies that all war forces an individual to face one’s own internal demons as we contemplate what we are capable of doing, like the Sulcarmen, to survive. By unleashing the horrors of war—Napalm, the carpet-bombing of Cambodia and Laos, the intolerable loss of American lives—Americans could claim no higher moral ground than those we feared and despised. Norton seems to imply that if protecting ourselves requires us to perpetrate such evil, how can we consider ourselves good? In conducting war, the line between good and evil blurs.

When Simon and Jaelithe finally confront the forces of Kolder in Kolder’s own home world, they face the glaringly obvious problem: they must destroy Kolder completely or else Estcarp will face endless war against them. The climatic end to the second book in the Witch World series brings the forces of Estcarp total victory but at the cost of destroying another civilization, the Kolder people themselves. Despite Simon’s own admonition that “to use Kolder’s means,”—mind control and genocide—“was to deliver oneself in part to the enemy,” Norton’s second volume ends with the total destruction of a people. As Jaelithe declares “‘Kolder… dead,’” she recognizes that the “evil it [sowed] lives still,” in “‘the hates, the greeds, the envies from which it was

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fashioned.”39 It will continue to threaten Estcarp again, just as Soviet and Chinese communism would push back against American efforts to defend freedom and prosperity around the globe. And, just as American presidents pledged to pay any price to assure the survival and success of liberty, and despite Estcarp’s desire to simply “be left alone,”40 the warriors among them know that what lies before them is a war that they have no choice but to “fight to the end.”41

Americans in 1964 were only just beginning to understand the nature of the burden they had shoudered as protectors of democracy in Vietnam. Norton’s Witch World and Web of the Witch World offer them a glimpse of what that cost might entail. The enemy Estcarp faced was so insidious that even total destruction would not guarantee peace. It is a message of despair and hardship but, as John F. Kennedy pronounced at the start of his presidency in 1961, Americans pledged “to pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty.” Kennedy’s speech is a message of hope and determination to the world: Americans will not allow evil to prevail and will meet it everywhere it is found. Similarly, at the end of the battle against Kolder, Jaelithe proclaims: “This has been a quest of valor….We shall take our victories one by one and have pride in them.”42 The Wise Women of Escarp, like Americans in the tumultuous early 1960s, know they are

40 Ibid., 191.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
responsible for more than their own freedom, and, because of that, they cannot accept defeat.

Norton’s story is grounded on a notion like Martin Luther’s that sees evil as a force moving in the world, which must be opposed at all costs. While Norton’s story seems to reinforce the concept of good and evil as binary opposites, dramatizing the consequences of battling evil until it is destroyed, it also offers an alternative vision of war’s toll: unmitigated cultural destruction, environmental degradation, and genocide. This vision calls into question the logic of victory at all costs. Using the image of the doppelganger, as the Kolder fight Kolder, she subverts the idea that Americans held the moral high ground by attempting to destroy one civilization (North Vietnamese and Soviet and Chinese communism) in defense of another (South Vietnamese and American democracy). Similarly, she undermines American’s complacency toward the war at the start of the conflict. As we shall see, Americans and Norton’s readers would begin to feel the cost of battling the evil communist threat as the series and the 1960s progressed. In the remaining novels of the Witch World series Norton questions the underlying assumption of evil as a binary of polar opposites and the problem of facing down evil that does not back down.

**Rebellious Youth of Norton’s Witch World and America in the 1960s**

In Norton’s later works in the Witch World series, *Three Against the Witch World* (1965), *Warlock of the Witch World* (1967), and *Sorceress of the Witch World*, (1968) Simon and Jaelithe’s three children, Kyllan, Kemoc, and Kaththea, take center stage. The stories focus on the struggles these triplets undergo in order to master the Power that each
controls. As the last three novels in the series progress, each character finds his or her own way to respond to the needs of the community they adopt after abandoning Estcarp. Their decision to leave their home and make a perilous journey to avoid being used by the Escarp witches as tools in their ancient war mirrors the struggle American youth experienced as their country’s involvement in the Vietnam conflict escalated. The novels send the clear message that, as in Hegel’s moral philosophy, each individual bears responsibility for steering the community toward right action, and that each individual’s choice matters. In her third novel, Norton calls on American youth to take a stand against endless war and the unleashing of the ultimate weapon, reflecting young attitudes of 1960s anti-war activism. In the later two volumes, however, Norton will also require those who recognize evil’s threat to stand against it. This ambivalence and confusion was familiar territory to Americans of the day.

In the last three volumes of her series, each of the triplets narrates one book. Kyllan begins *Three Against the Witch World* 43 with a brief history of Estcarp after the Kolder defeat and the escalation of the war against Estcarp’s other enemies. As the novel opens, Kyllan reveals that because of his parents’ prominent role in Estcarp society and military they are often away on diplomatic or military missions. 44 Simon and Jaelithe’s absence forces the triplets to grow closer to one another, and they soon learn that they share an unusual gift: the ability to communicate with each other telepathically across great distances. 45

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44 Ibid., 17.

As Estcarp’s wars against their neighbors come to a climax all the lands bordering Estcarp turn their attention to defeating the Wise Women and destroying their use of the Power. In a last ditch effort to protect themselves and their homeland, the Witches “loose … all that might [of the Power]” knowing “[it] might burn out Estcarp.” They prove that they are willing to risk taking “the rest of [the] world”\textsuperscript{46} with them to defend themselves. By pooling all the Power under their control, the witches “make the mountains to walk, and the land itself answer their will.”\textsuperscript{47} They “altered the land, walled them[elves] away,”\textsuperscript{48} by raising a mountain range between themselves and their foes. The leaders of Estcarp, like the leaders of the Cold War, are willing to risk all, rather than face defeat.

The Tregarth triplets, however, reject their leaders’ choice. They refuse to be part of the Wise Women’s plans in the endless war of their parents’ generation. They know that by defying the Council of Escarp, they will be hunted and imprisoned. And so they must flee their homeland. Following Hegel’s ethical injunction stated as follows:

\begin{quote}
  . . . when “the existing world…has become unfaithful to the better will [and] this will no longer finds itself in the duties…accepted in this world…[the individual] must seek to recover…that harmony which it has lost in actuality.”\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

Like so many young Americans of the time, by rejecting the will of their society they put themselves in opposition to it and so were forced to oppose it or to leave.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 33.

The image Norton paints of the force unleashed by the witches to build a wall between themselves and their enemies bears eerie similarity to the testimony of survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.\(^5^0\) In one last assault to defeat their enemies, the witches unleash a fury of the Power. Kyllan recounts:

... [H]e was “shocked by a sharp flash of fire across the sky. There was, in answer, an ominous grumbling unlike any natural thunder I had ever heard before...[The] ground under us...shuddered...[followed by] a long moment of utter silence, then fury such as no man could imagine broke over and around us. ...Wind which had been missing all day burst into frantic life, whipping the candled trees and bushes, tearing the air from our nostrils. One could not fight this—one lost his very identity in such an alien storm. We could only endure and hope, very faintly hope, that we could outlast the raving elements of earth, fire, air, and then water. For there was rain—or could you truly name such stinging lashes of water rain?\(^5^1\)

In the defense of their homeland, Estcarp is determined to use every weapon it has, no matter its costs. In unleashing the most destructive of forces known to their world, the witches of Estcarp, violate both Aristotle’s expectation that an individual must find a mean between the satisfaction of the extremes of one’s desires and needs, and the Kantian categorical imperative that one should “never act except in such a way that [one] can also will that [one’s] maxim should become a universal law.”\(^5^2\) In disregarding the needs of the world they inhabit, and by assuming that their safety was paramount, they act in direct violation of Kant’s requirement that one should act as if one’s behavior could be a universal law for all. By depicting a society in which the defense of the good results


\(^{5^1}\) Norton, *Three Against the Witch World*, 35-36.

\(^{5^2}\) Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, §402.
in such a devastating evil, Norton signals that the line between good and evil is no longer clear. In sending her young protagonists over the mountains away from their homeland, she judges Estcarp’s actions to be evil.

In the chapters that follow, the triplets risk their lives to escape a future of war that they do not want to fight and cannot support. Like the triplets, many draft-age Americans of the 1960s faced a similar choice: either participate in the nation’s escalating war in Vietnam, or escape north to Canada and face an uncertain future. By going north, or burning their draft notices, some American youth associated their own government’s goals, the execution of the war, with evil. Norton’s novel, by supporting such a choice (to leave or be imprisoned rather than fight) subverted the moral underpinnings of that war. Following Hegel, Norton and American young men asserted their duty to hold their community to higher moral standard by comparing it to the Gospel message in pursuit of a “better will.” Norton employs the elements of the fantasy novel to interrogate and disrupt American notions of good and evil as they work themselves out in the consensus reality and the novels, and she finds the United States’ position in Vietnam to be flawed. In doing so she seems to urge American young people to resist the war and its execution.

Evil and its Effects on the Witch World

The Tregarth siblings’ flight from Estcarp takes them east to Escore where the Old Race once thrived. As the series unfolds the triplets learn the history of the land they have adopted and come to participate in its defense. In these stories, Norton’s heroes

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battle what, at first, appears to be an ancient force that has corrupted the land and those
who dwell on it. In later novels, however, Norton reveals evil to be a manifestation of the
way individuals use the Power. In these volumes, Norton asserts that it isn’t the force that
is evil but how it is used. Drawing images of light and shadow, contrasting nature with
machines, and introducing characters who use the Power for selfish personal ends,
Norton takes the Tregarths into a world in which it seems nature itself has become
corrupted. There, the triplets struggle with their ability to control the Power, as well as
with their own personal motivations for doing so.

At the time that Norton’s works were published, the United States involvement in
the war in Southeast Asia was escalating. Norton’s final three volumes reflect the shifting
landscape of American attitudes toward that war, the debate over conduct of American
troops, the treatment of veterans returning home and those who opposed the war, and a
growing discomfort in America with violence against African Americans and Civil
Rights protestors throughout the United States. As the Tregarths struggle with their own
exercise of the Power, a long stable truce between two opposite communities explodes
into violence. In the consensus reality of Norton’s readers, a similar explosion was taking
place across America. Long simmering conflict in both worlds, the America of the 1960s
and Norton’s Witch World, were coming to a head. And in both worlds, young people
faced difficult choices.

As their fates become entwined with the fate of Escore, each of the Tregarth
siblings must make difficult choices as they choose their paths. On each of their decisions
rests the future of Escore itself. Each sibling’s choice inevitably leads to the final
confrontation at the end of the last book in the series, *Sorceress of the Witch World*. In
that battle the Old Race fights forces that thirst for more Power. Only by combining their strength do the triplets finally defeat those who would use them to further selfish, self-serving ends. Young people of the 1960s also began to recognize their strength as they combined forces to protest the war and support the Civil Rights movements. They also shed the trappings of the suburban America lifestyle by experimenting with communal living, sexual freedom, and drugs. Old images of mainstream America began to crumble as youth culture moved from chewing gum, poodle skirts, and “D.A. haircuts,” to marijuana, LSD, long hair, and blue jeans. The times were changing and Norton’s novels reflect the triplets’ growing sense of discomfort with the old ways of Estcarp and a new sense of freedom. The Tregarth siblings must decide whether to join together as they have always done, or break from one another and find an individual path in Escore. Restricting the triplets’ choices is a new danger to the Power that the siblings do not understand. Norton slowly reveals the nature of that danger and the threat it poses to the unsuspecting triplets.

Soon after their arrival in this previously unknown land, Kyllan leaves his siblings to hunt for food and water. When he comes upon a maze-like arrangement of pillars and blocks on a raised platform he stumbles unwittingly into a trap that exposes the malignant forces that dwell in Escore. He climbs the platform to explore and is quickly sucked toward a gaping maw that seems to want to consume him. From the center of the maze “came forth…a kind of gloating recognition that prey was advancing to its maw, a
lapping tongue from which [his] whole nature revolted. A complete and loathsome evil... a black foulness.”

As Kyllan fights to free himself of the entity that seeks to devour him, Norton reaffirms that to use the Power one must focus “will, imagination, and faith.” Only in asserting his identity and his own control of the Power can the evil he faces be resisted. Doing so requires strength and conviction. In Kyllan’s battle against the force, he uses his own particular strength with the Power, the ability to touch the consciousnesses of living things. Inside the “stone web” hides a creature that rages in confusion at Kyllan’s resistance. The thing he fights is “the very opposite of all that life meant to [him].” It is despair and death. In the world in which Norton’s protagonists have landed, the very landscape itself hides horrors that reek of evil. The grief, fear, and hopelessness the triplets face as they explore Escore matches the pall that hung over turning eighteen in a nation that sent its young men to struggle against the maw that was Vietnam. As the war expanded, many young men who served in the military never came home.

Kaththea recognizes that the force in the sinkhole in which Kyllan nearly died is similar to the Wise Women’s Power, but “‘distorted and debased,’” a tainted form of the Power of Estcarp. In these early passages, descriptions of the Power evoke decay, confusion, menace, and predation. Here, Norton begins to portray evil as a force in the universe that preys on human will. But Norton’s evil is not so easily understood. In

54 Norton, Three Against WW, 76.
55 Norton, Witch World, 35.
56 Norton, Three Against WW, 76.
57 Ibid., 77.
Escore, the Power has become divided, like the image of *mal’ak* Yahweh from ancient Jewish thought. The Power represents a single entity which has two sides, one benevolent and good, ⁵⁸ and the other “Dark.”⁵⁹ In the consensus reality of Norton’s reader, the two sides of American military power manifested itself in the clash between the rhetoric of America’s role in defending freedom overseas, and the graphic images of the war in Vietnam. In addition, as the fight for justice and equality at home grew, U.S. police forces and National Guardsmen could be seen aiding both sides of the Civil Rights movement. Power is neutral, Norton suggests; human motives determines whether it has good or evil effects.

**Corruption of Power in *Three Against the Witch World***

In *Three Against the Witch World*, Norton’s characters begin to determine how the Power that they have known and used all their lives, a force which was neither good or evil, has become divided and befouled.⁶⁰ Everywhere the very corruption of nature manifests itself as a warping of the Power. Rodent-like animals called “rasti,” move like “slinking shadows—black, agile…swift”⁶¹ to stalk the triplets, not for food to survive but out of a “red madness of kill, kill, tear and devour.”⁶² In these creatures straight from a nightmare, Kyllan senses “an insanity which was not animal, but raw fury…[and]  

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⁵⁸ Ibid., 86.  
⁵⁹ Ibid., 80.  
⁶⁰ Ibid., 131.  
⁶¹ Ibid., 82.  
⁶² Ibid., 52.
cunning.”63 In Escore, the Power reaches “chaotic depths of complete unbalance.”64

When a rider wielding a weapon that emits a “burst of white, searing light”65 beats back the rasti,66 Kaththea declares that the rider “was of the Power—and for good, not ill.”67 Here is the first sign that some remnant of the Power has held itself free of whatever has corrupted this world. Associating light, fire, and water with the forces that allow the triplets to survive, Norton offers the reader hope that evil has not completely consumed this land.

The triplets soon learn how the Power became corrupted. “Seekers after knowledge experimented with Powers they thought they understood.” They began “with good intention[s] not by any active evil.”68 But then discoveries, “feeding upon” more discoveries, began to “subtly [alter] spirit, mind, and sometimes, even body. Power, for its results was what first [was] sought, but then, inevitably, it was Power for the sake of power alone. [Those seeking power] did not accept gradual changes’ they began to force them….69 Evil in Escore grew not from a corruption of the Power itself, but from its unbridled use by those whose aim was solely the control of more power.70 Knowledge for personal aggrandizement and power corrupted the magic as individuals began to delve

63 Ibid., 83.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 85.
66 Ibid., 83.
67 Ibid., 85.
68 Ibid., 130.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 115.
beyond the ability to control the changes. As the experimentation continued, monstrous children and animals were born. These altered beings were murdered, used, or manipulated for the Power they controlled until finally, a struggle began that “eclipsed the fast fading brightness of the land.”\textsuperscript{71} Those who saw danger in wielding power for personal gain failed to stop its advance. Norton explains:

\begin{quote}
\ldots[Some of the] Old Race, as yet unshadowed by the evil flowering among their kind [at] first…sounded war horns, gathering a host to put down the enemy. But they had waited far too long; they were a dipper of water against the ocean. War brought them bitter defeat and the prospect of being utterly lost in the ocean of defilement, which was turning their homeland into a morass wherein no decent thing might find existence.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Norton warns of the dangers of turning a blind eye to the evil that was growing among those who would use the power for their own ends. As Hegel would assert, those who fail to act are as complicit in the acts of evil as those who perpetrate the acts themselves. Furthermore, as those seeking power abuse the creatures they manufacture for their own purposes they violate Kant’s injunction against using another person for one’s own ends. Nor did the experimenters consider the effect of their actions on the society. Norton sounds a clear warning against turning one’s back on actions one finds deplorable. She also calls attention to the dangers inherent in scientific advances that furthered the arms race, the conduct of the war in Vietnam, and a mission to the moon. She hints at the problems that come from blindly meddling with powers we don’t understand and doing so without regard to their costs or effects.

As the those who would use the Power for their own ends spread un-opposed through Escore, those who wanted nothing to do with them “withdrew to the wild…Evil

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
ruled totally except in [those] wastes,”\(^{73}\) where those seeking peace fled. In time, the seekers after power turned on one another until, finally, all who were left were “lulled into a kind of abstracted existence in which they floated unmoved and unmoving.”\(^{74}\) The creatures born of the abuse of the Power thrived, however, and Escore became a world divided but at peace. Into this delicately balanced truce, Kyllan, Kemoc and Kaththea returned. When the triplets attempt to use the Power in self-defense, the ancient battle is renewed. Dahaum, one of the triplets’ allies, explains to Kylan:

“You do not really realize what your coming means to us, do you? . . . We have walked a very narrow path between utter dark on one hand, and chaos on the other. Now forces are loosed to nudge us into peril. Chance may dictate that such a move will bring us through to new beginnings—or it may be the end of us.”\(^{75}\)

As Dahaum makes clear, the triplets’ presence has tipped an uneasy balance and old dark powers cannot let the change stand. The triplets, instead of beginning their lives anew away from the battles of their parents’ world, have stumbled into an even more sinister land. *Three Against the Witch World* reads like a cautionary tale of the dangers of meddling with the forces one cannot control as Dahaum describes races and creatures altered for perverse and unseemly purposes. In Escore, they find the rasti, in addition to a race of Lizard-people to which Dahaum belongs, and a people that Kyllan describes as “an un-holy mingling of species —wolf and man,” with fangs and a snarling “coughing

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\(^{73}\) Ibid., 132.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 132-33.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 147.
growl” for speech. With the reawakening of ancient forces, old battle-lines are redrawn, and allies and enemies gather to face one another again.

Norton’s story asserts that it is not the Power of the universe that is evil, but the corrupted use of it. What haunts Escore are the manifestations of evil created in arrogance, hubris, and a greed for power. Here Norton begins to frame a new understanding of evil for her readers. While evil first appeared to be a part of nature, Norton makes clear that evil instead results from human choices grounded in the human will. In Three Against the Witch World Norton warns of the corrupting effect of unbridled arrogance and the desire for power. In the last two volumes of her series, Warlock of the Witch World, and Sorceress of the Witch World, Norton explores the effects these corrupting attitudes have on the individual human spirit itself.

**Hubris and Personal Power: Kemoc and Katethea Tregarth Battle Their Inner Selves for the Survival of Escore**

In an interview published in the first issue of The Norton Newsletter, in March 1979, Andre Norton explains that the fourth book of the Witch World series, Warlock of the Witch World, “is a retelling of the old Saxon story of Childe Roland.” As she explores themes of jealousy and identity through the eyes of Kemoc, she also begins to refine a theory of evil that offers insight into the times during which she wrote. Good and evil in the American experience of the 1960s, as seen through a lens of America’s conflicts, were defined by the battle between communist tyranny and capitalist

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76 Ibid., 120.

democracy. In addition, Americans fought injustice at home. The signposts and battle lines were easily discernable. As in the 1950s, according to the political rhetoric of the day, communism was an evil threat to America’s very existence. American soldiers and covert forces were deployed around the globe to battle its spread. As the decade progressed, however, a conflict loomed over American society as it struggled between a sense of duty to protect freedom and liberty around the world and the swelling sense that the battle was tainting America’s self image and soul. According to Russell Buhite, professor of history at the University of Tennessee, by the middle of the 1960s attitudes toward American involvement overseas began to change and “far fewer members of the mass public believed that the United States should maintain the international commitments it incurred over the previous twenty years.” Americans no longer saw themselves as the bastion of good against the encroaching evil of communism. As the cost in American lives to play that role rose resistance to the war increased. Furthermore, as revelations concerning U.S. involvement in Latin America, Africa, and the Caribbean demonstrated the effects of U.S. power around the globe, Americans began to reject the formerly sacrosanct belief that the United States stood as a bulwark against the evil Soviet Union. Evil no longer appeared to be something the enemy perpetrated upon us, but a product of our own actions, as well.

78 The United States covert operations supported anti-communist movements in places as far flung as Chile and the Congo. For excellent summaries of American activities to combat communism during this era see, for example. Stephen Kinzer, Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change From Hawaii to Iraq (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006); Lars Schoultz, Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), among others.

Similarly, more and more marginalized populations at home began to push back against the institutions that repressed them, as evidenced by movements lead by the Panthers, Martin Luther King, Jr., and farmworkers’ unions. All these struggles brought to American consciousness questions concerning what it meant to be American and for what values we were willing to fight and die.

In the fourth volume of Norton’s series, *The Warlock of the Witch World*, Norton further clarifies her portrayal of evil. She explores the notion of the clash between good and evil that takes place within the individual. At the same time as Norton’s young characters struggle with issues of identity and purpose, Americans were questioning the choices their leaders were making with respect to the Cold War and revelations about the conduct of the war in Vietnam.

As Kemoc and Kaththea exercise increasing control of the Power, Norton continues to assert that it is how the Power is employed that determines if it is evil or good. Following the Childe Roland structure Norton described as a basis for this fourth volume, Kemoc must face Dinzil, a suspicious member of the Old Race who Kemoc hates bitterly, “coldly, and [for what] reason [he] did not know.”80 His hatred grows more intense when he recognizes Kaththea’s infatuation with him. When Kaththea goes with Dinzil to his distant home in order to gain strength in the Power, Kemoc believes he must rescue her.

After a series of tests to prove his allegiance using the Power for the good,81 Kemoc approaches the Dark Tower where Kaththea is held. In his first confrontation with

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81 Ibid., 86.
Dinzil, he is stripped of his humanity, and transformed into a hideous “green-gray” creature of “warty hide with straggling patches of hair-fine tendrils of flesh growing out of it. [His] hands were paws, webbed, thickened; [his] feet like them.”82 His “head [is] set forward between high, hunched shoulders.”83 Whimpering and weeping, he discovers his chest is a “distorted barrel,” he has a top-heavy torso and “abnormally slender loins and legs,” with a mouth that is “a wide gash with little lip,” and “sharply pointed fangs;” his nose “[has] ceased to exist.”84 In his moment of crisis in facing Dinzil, he becomes monstrous. As Jeffrey Cohen explains in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, “The monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, [and] anxiety...”85 In the Dark Tower, Dinzil explains:

…[A] man sees…not his outer form, but the inner; the thing he himself has fashioned through the years by his ill desires, his hidden lusts, the evil he has thought on doing but had not the courage to act upon. Do you recognize your inner self now—when it is turned to outer–Kemoc Tregarth…?86

Dinzil forces Kemoc to confront his own inner motives as he battles to rescue his sister. He fights to regain his former shape by asserting the goodness he knows lies within himself. Then Dinzil reveals to Kemoc what Kaththea has become. She, too, appears to be a toad-like thing that is not the sister Kemoc came to save. In this transformative image, Norton explores the toll war takes on those who fight it. As

82 Ibid., 164.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 164-65.
86 Ibid., 178.
Kemoc struggles to rescue his sister, he must confront not only his own motives but also the means he must use to destroy his hated enemy. Norton suggests that a soldier sacrifices his or her humanity in deciding to kill or be killed. It is in this decision that the line between good and evil blurs. With the choice to participate, no matter the cause or need, a soldier is transformed into a hideous distorted creature. As Kemoc and Kaththea struggle to regain their true forms, the siblings also confront the truth behind their hideous transformations. Contrasted with Dinzil, they come to realize, their motivations are good, revealing Norton’s underlying message that motivation is key.

Afraid for himself and his sister, Kemoc remembers a warning he received from a trusted friend before he journeyed to the tower. Warned that Dinzil’s power feeds on fear and hate, and that in the lands that serve the Dark “foul is fair, and fair is foul”

Kemoc realizes that all that is of the Light will appear hideous in Dinzil’s domain. Hideousness in evil lands is a sign of goodness. Realizing he must appeal to Kaththea’s inner goodness to save her, Kemoc turns to the only tools he has left to him, his love for his sister and memories of their happy childhood in Estcarp. These tools break through the barrier Dinzil has erected between the siblings and in the silence she recognizes him despite his monstrous appearance. With this recognition, Kemoc embraces his own and his sister’s inner goodness. Norton asserts that only by knowing one’s truth can actions be judged good or evil.

By appealing to Kaththea’s inner innocence, and who she was as a child, Kemoc convinces her to return to the Valley with him. Once out of the Tower but still in Dinzil’s

\[87\] Ibid., 145.

\[88\] Ibid., 184.
realm, her anguish at seeing what she has become pushes her over the edge, despite the fact that it is a manifestation of what is good. Believing she is what she sees in the mirror, she succumbs to the Shadow’s influence and turns on Kemoc. She takes hold of the Power, and transforms herself back into the beautiful girl Kemoc remembers. In the land where “foul is fair, and fair is foul,” however, her vanity and lust for the Power has turned her into the enemy of the all those fighting for the Light.

Warlock of the Witch World enters the 1960s’ debate over United States’ activities in Southeast Asia as it desperately fought to impose democracy and capitalism in Vietnam. Coinciding with revelations about the effects of napalm on the people and the Vietnamese landscape, the Mai Lai massacre, and Operation Rolling Thunder against targets in Cambodia, and Laos, Norton questions the morality of the war. In revealing the negative effects the Tregarth triplets’ use of the Power had on their lives and that they were indistinguishable from the effects it caused on those who wielded it before them, Norton suggests that American actions in Vietnam had come to look no different than those of its enemies. Here Norton explores the effect of the war on Americans themselves. She mirrors the growing American fear that the lines between good and evil might no longer be clear. As her portrayal of who is good and who evil in Escore blur an individual’s sense of identity, Norton seems to ask readers to compare the war the United States was fighting to the rhetoric surrounding it. As they witnessed the escalating horrors on the evening news and felt the impact of the growing death toll on their families and communities, Norton compels the reader to wonder if the ends and means of the war itself had become corrupted.90

89 Ibid., 145.

90 Ambrose, Rise To Globalism, 216.
When Kaththea turns to the Shadow, despite her insistence that her powers will defeat their enemies, Norton hints at the growing repulsion Americans felt at the carnage and growing unease that the methods needed to defend freedom and democracy might contradict the rhetoric that equated evil with communism. Interesting, however, is that despite Norton’s subversion of the American rhetoric around Vietnam, the novel also suggests a different message. In Kaththea and Kemoc’s eventual victory over Dinzil, Norton demonstrates that perhaps the ends have justified the means. In the charged atmosphere of the 1960s, Norton’s uncertainty about the war mirrors the confusion that young people felt. While many were willing to fight and die in their nation’s war, Americans of all ages and races began to wonder just what that nation stood for.

In the final volume of her Witch World series, Norton sends Kaththea into the final battle between the forces of the Light and those of the Shadow. However, Norton introduces a new question into the confusion. While Kaththea works to regain the powers she lost during her enslavement to Dinzil, Norton suggests that what a community considers good or evil depends on that community’s perspective. In her exploration of Kaththea’s motivations for independence, Norton seems to suggest that where one stands in a conflict defines one’s understanding of good and evil. In this final volume she questions whether the ends do justify the means, and what ends, finally, are too evil to consider. Finally, in this last volume of her series, Norton seems to speculate that perhaps the best that can be hoped for in a war against evil is a draw? By the end of Sorceress of the Witch World, the combatants, who have been fighting against the Shadow their entire lives, finally drive them “back and back” into “holes and hiding places” where they seal them in with the Power. While the land is “cleared of the
Shadow” they have not destroyed it.\footnote{Norton, \textit{Sorceress of the Witch World} (New York: Ace Books, 1968), 280.} As in the international political environment, communism persisted even as Americans fought to contain it at the cost of their sons’ and daughters’ lives and the demise of moral certainty that their cause was just. Norton’s tale, told over the entire series, brings Americans face to face with the truth of the horrors of the war in Vietnam: American lives are sacrificed and still the enemy lurks, waiting for the next opportunity to strike.

In \textit{Sorceress of the Witch World}, the final novel, Kaththea struggles to regain the Power she lost because of Dinzil’s corruption of it by returning to Estcarp to be trained by the Wise Women there. Before she can cross the mountain barrier between her homeland and Escore, however, an avalanche separates her from her brothers and her escort. A nomad community rescues her and soon she becomes bound to them, forced to use her minimal powers to serve them despite her desire to flee. In her role as seeress she must find good hunting grounds and warn the community against surprise attacks from their enemies. When she fails to foresee one such attack, Ayllia, the wife of the community’s headman, accuses her of failing to protect them because of her longing for her own freedom. “You wanted free of us!” Ayllia charges, “So you let the raiders come so you could run while they let their swords drink! You are a dark one—”\footnote{Ibid., 116, 117.} Allyia’s condemnation of Kaththea strikes a nerve. In her effort to free herself, she failed to save the community she was charged to protect. In this way, Norton reveals the struggle between the good and evil within Kaththea as the sorceress begins to question
her own motivation. Here Norton introduces the idea that what is good for one, might be evil to another. Kaththea explains:

I had been so keen on regaining my powers—for my own gain…. And there is a balance in such things. Used for ill, good becomes ill, and that effect snowballs until even when one desires it greatly one cannot summon good, only something scarred and disfigured by the Shadow. Was I so maimed that from now on when I did aught with what I had in me it would injure others? 93

Kaththea questions whether what one sees as evil depend on one’s perspective. If there can be no “determinate and univocal” 94 paradigm on which to adjudicate claims of right and wrong, as Richard Bernstein questions in Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science Hermeneutics and Praxis, how does one act? How can one judge right from wrong? Kaththea’s thoughts get at the very heart of the question of relativism as Bernstein sees it

In Ayllia’s accusation, Kaththea hears truth. And so Norton offers a similar question to ponder: when do American actions become more evil than the evil it fights? Norton confronts a very real concern about whether or not the purpose of an action performed for some stated good for oneself or one’s community absolves the actor of the unintended negative consequences.

In her flight from the raiders who destroy the village, Kaththea, accompanied by Ayllia flees through a hidden gate into yet another alien world. There, they find another world at war. Humans and human/machine hybrids fight for domination of a crumbling

93 Ibid., 124.

As the refugees from Escore explore, they learn that the war they have stumbled upon has lasted untold years.

Captured by the human forces, Kaththea and Aylia encounter Zandur, a mysterious combatant who deploys the world’s technology to manipulate those who control the Power. Zandur seeks to enslave Kaththea so she will do his “‘will’ forever.”

In her portrayal of a society involved in a “very ancient war” that “had existed so long as a way of life that [its combatants] could not think of any other pattern,” and which uses others for their own ends, Norton again questions the notion that good and evil depend on perspective. Kaththea notes that Zandur “spoke as one waging a battle in a rightful cause.” Zandur does not use Kaththea’s power for his own personal gain, but in the “cause” against mortal enemies. But, Kaththea notes, in his battle against the human/machine hybrids, Zandur had fallen into “the pitfall which few seldom avoid.”

Kaththea spells out the dilemma all nations at war must face:

...The time comes when to the fighters the end justifies the means...seduced by the thought of the victory so badly needed, by the smell of power...He could still deceive himself that what he did was for a high purpose, thus making him the more to be feared.

\[95\] Ibid., 172.
\[96\] Ibid., 159.
\[97\] Ibid., 195.
\[98\] Ibid., 196.
\[99\] Ibid., 179.
\[100\] Ibid.
\[101\] Ibid., 179-180.
Norton asserts that the single-minded pursuit of victory over one’s enemies can, itself, be evil. Norton seems to ask, has America crossed that line?

While reaching out with her mind to beseech her brothers for aid, even though she believes they are beyond her reach in Escore, Kaththea touches two familiar minds—Jaelithe and Simon. Her parents, while fleeing Estcarp years earlier had made their way to this embattled world but were unable to return. Combining her parents’ strength with the powerful warlock Hilarion, another of Zandur’s prisoners and the creator of the gate the refugees all have used, Kaththea defeats Zandur’s plans to harness her power. Once back through Hilarion’s ancient gate, Kaththea and her party abandon Hilarion out of fear that he is an agent of the Shadow. They make their way back to familiar terrain where they confront the gathering forces of Darkness. Like the forces of communism, which had “no timetable”102 nor any doubt that they would eventually succeed (as capitalism was supposed to wither away), the forces of the Shadow have been biding their time in Escore, waiting for those arrayed against them to exhaust themselves in self-defense. In the final confrontation, Kaththea empties herself in the battle and, believing she is on the verge of death, she feels “no fear, only the wish to be at peace forever.”103 In this final act of sacrifice on behalf of her community Kaththea feels redeemed, and Norton seems to suggest that America, too, must continue to fight, no matter the cost.

As she closes the story, Kaththea claims an end to her “part of the saga of Escore,” in which the land is cleansed. But in her acknowledgement that forces of the Shadow are driven

102 Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism*, 95.

103 Ibid., 279.
back to their holes and hiding places, Norton allows Escore to stand in for the American battle against communism. Having driven evil forces back, Norton reveals that the forces America and the Light battle remain alive and active to awaken another time. In an environment of exhaustion and sacrifice, the only hope remaining to the people of Escore, and by extension to Americans, is a tenuous balance and peace postponed. Norton seems to suggest that perhaps the best that any nation can hope for is an uneasy truce.

**Conclusion**

Andre Norton’s Witch World series mirrors the struggle in the American psyche as communist tyranny and capitalist democracy clashed around the world. Following the brinkmanship of the early 1960s when the world waited while President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev struggled through the Cuban Missile Crisis and the long costly war in Vietnam, American taste for war and nuclear saber rattling collapsed. Norton’s story evolves from showing a community eager to destroy the enemy root and branch to one willing to tolerate the contained and tamed evil that restores balance and allows the community to prosper and move on. In the tumultuous events of the 1960s, the United States began to reevaluate its role as the world’s guardian against evil and to reexamine its own goals and motivations. In this turning inward, good and evil can no longer be seen as clear-cut, nor as a looming threat from an external rival. The fantasy novels I turn to next explore further what Norton tentatively introduces in her Witch World series: the concept that evil is rooted in individual motivation and choice.

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104 Ibid., 280.
CHAPTER 7

A NEW PERSPECTIVE: AMERICAN FANTASY LITERATURE SEARCHES THE HUMAN SOUL – 1965 TO 1989

As for courage and will – we cannot measure how much of each lies within us, we can only trust there will be sufficient to carry us through trials which may lie ahead.

~Andre Norton, *Gryphon in Glory*

Between 1964 and 1990 Americans and American fantasy literature underwent profound change. The descent into the quagmire that was Vietnam and the continued violence against African Americans and those working for equality upended American’s perceptions of their nation’s commitment to fighting tyranny abroad and celebrating justice at home. The change in perception was compounded by the realization that, in order to be an effective world leader, the geopolitical reality of the Cold War meant that the United States could not afford to be squeamish about war, espionage, or regime destabilization. Furthermore, domestic events such as the civil rights battles in the South, political assassinations, and government scandals spawned pessimism about the future and mistrust of leaders. Tired and ashamed of the long war in Vietnam and its horrors — the body count, the destruction caused by napalm and the bombing of Laos and Cambodia, the My Lai massacre—all witnessed on the nightly news, Americans began to feel that the nation was in decline.¹ Widespread among Americans was the belief that we had only ourselves to blame for much of what was troubling the country.

In the 1970s, declining American pride rested on new troubles. The 1973 oil crisis, the Watergate scandal, the Iran hostage crisis, and aggressive Soviet arms policies initiated a period of national soul-searching and feelings of military weakness, insecurity and loss of prestige. Jimmy Carter’s presidency marks a low point of the era. His Southern Baptist roots and his insistence that moral and human rights standards guide the United States’ actions at home and abroad led to a pullback of American support for nations who, though U.S. allies, violated human rights and tyrannized their own people. A rise in the power and importance of the so-called “Third World” block of nations in the United Nations and in regional conflicts and international politics challenged the previously uncontested hegemonies of the U.S.S.R. and the United States. Americans began to wonder if the United States should find a way to co-exist with the Soviet Union. A sense of malaise permeated the era.

In addition to the perceived decline of international prestige, trouble at home led to a belief that the blame for U.S. decline lay at the feet of the people themselves, in their choice of leaders, and the direction the government was heading. A backlash against the permissiveness of the 1960s, the failure of social programs in the fight against poverty, the problems posed by bussing in the effort to integrate schools, the failure of ratification by the states of the Equal Rights Amendment, and still other failures of the progressive model of government prompted a shift in focus. The perception of moral decline accompanied by the reemergence of conservatism manifested itself in the growth of fundamentalist churches and cults, the demonization of feminism, and the reassertion of
traditional gender roles and family structures. America was undergoing a crisis of heart\textsuperscript{2} that reflected a transition from modernism to postmodernism. America, some believed, had wandered from its fundamental principles of God, tradition, science, and freedom and was experiencing amnesia about the grand narrative that had sustained and guided the nation through a glorified past. Rooting the blame for America’s problems in individual moral decline and a failure to adhere to the foundational principles that led Americans to believe in its exceptionalism manifests itself in the nature of the evil faced by protagonists of the fantasy literature of this period.

**The Changing Face of Evil in American Fantasy between 1964 and 1989.**

The change in American fantasy literature published between 1964 and 1989 reflects an attitude widespread among Americans at the time. Many believed that U.S. social and international problems rested upon its own failings as a nation. Containment policies forced the U.S. to support oppressive dictators in the developing world and escalated the arms race to the point of guaranteed mutual assured destruction, prompting American youth to reject the policies and stifling morality of the adult world.

During this period, American young adult fantasy writers produced some of its most enduring titles: Lloyd Alexander’s Prydain Chronicles, Ursula Le Guin’s Earthsea Cycle, and less popular, though important because it is written by a member of an Othered community, Virginia Hamilton’s Justice Trilogy. With these titles, authors address themes that reflect the changing attitude of Americans toward themselves, their government, their culture, and their nation’s enemies. In these novels, fighting evil is no

\textsuperscript{2} See especially, Jenkins, *Nightmares*. Jenkins’s work follows the decline in liberalism and the rise of neo-conservatism in the United States throughout this era.
longer portrayed as a grand battle between two opposing forces controlling the universe; rather, each battle occurs first in the individual soul. Protagonists must find their own path toward the good, before they can face those who have chosen a path toward evil. In the process, authors of this period draw attention to underlying assumptions about American power, community, how we perceive the outsider, and the nature of evil itself.

In the fantasy novels I examine, evil has also changed. Writers move away from portraying evil as emanating from supernatural agents that influence the characters in the story. In many of the most popular YA works of fantasy of the era, evil has transformed into a force found in the human soul that originates in personal choice. It moves from being a force of nature or a part of the universe, as in Poul Anderson’s novels and the early works of Andre Norton’s Witch World series, to one that resides directly in the individual’s relationship with others, one’s power, personal goals, and often, a desire for immortality. Evil moves from being portrayed as powerful demons or as a mysterious force of darkness working through human beings, to the manifestations of evil as a result of human will and choice. By 1990, with the rise of neoliberal economic policies and neoconservative attitudes about the United States’ position in the world vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, fantasy literature blames evil on human beings.

All of the stories I examine in this chapter represent a clear break with the approach to evil found in such titles as Poul Anderson’s *Three Hearts and Three Lions,* and the early volumes of Andre Norton’s Witch World series. In those works, as I describe in previous chapters, evil is a force in the universe that works through individuals for its own ends. Anderson personifies it as Chaos. Norton represents it as the Kolder. These forces influence events in the novels by manipulating both human and
non-human characters. In the works I address in this chapter, evil, no matter how it manifests itself, is firmly seated in human beings, specifically in the choices the characters make and in an individual’s personal freedom. Antagonists choose paths that take them into conflict with a community, forcing those around them also to make choices: choices about how they will respond to the antagonists’ actions, and where their own responsibility begins and ends in the face of the encroaching danger. In almost every case in these novels, magic works as a metaphor for personal power and, in using it, a character reveals whether he or she will work as a force for good or for evil.

Lloyd Alexander’s Prydain Chronicles

Lloyd Alexander’s Prydain Chronicles (The Book of Three (1964), The Black Cauldron (1965), Castle of Llyr (1966), Taran Wanderer (1967), The High King (1968), and The Foundling (1971)) follow the adventures of the foundling Taran, an assistant pig keeper for an ancient spell caster named Dallben. At the start of the first volume, The Book of Three, Hen Wen, the “oracular” pig attended to by Taran, runs away. She fears the approach of the Horned King, the mysterious new threat to the peaceful kingdom of Prydain. The Horned King has been sent to destroy Hen Wen at the behest of the evil King Arawn, who rules Annuvin, “The Land of Death.”³ Hen Wen knows the key to destroying both the Horned King and King Arawn, who has tormented the people of Prydain since he usurped Annuvin’s crown from the sorceress Achren centuries earlier.

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³ Lloyd Alexander, The Prydain Chronicles: The Book of Three, the Black Cauldron, the Castle of Llyr, Taran Wanderer, the High King, & The Foundling and Other Tales of Prydain (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1973). All references in this thesis to titles in Alexander’s Prydain series refer to this edition in which all six works are collected into one volume.
Arawn’s evil comes from his efforts to enslave all of Prydain by eliminating the human use of magic and the magical instruments created at the foundation of time by Govannion, a “master craftsman,”⁴ which were intended to help make human life joyful and productive. In his storehouses in Annuvin, (the name itself means Hell⁵), Arawn has hoarded these magical instruments in order to “deprive [humankind], to keep their use from men, to sap [their] strength by denying [them]…what might yield a richer harvest.”⁶ In addition, he hides from humans “the ancient knowledge of metalsmiths [sic], potters, herdsmen and farmers.”⁷ But worst of all, Arawn has given the Horned King the most terrible weapon he possesses, a black cauldron that has the ability to raise the dead and force them into the ranks of his army.

Here is a direct violation of Kant’s requirement that individuals never be used as a means to an end.⁸ Arawn’s treasure hoards also violate Aristotle’s recommendation to find the mean in satisfying one’s needs and his admonition against greed and gluttony.⁹ Arawn and the Horned King contribute to the degradation of life in Prydain. Evil comes not from a hidden forces in the universe, but a desire by human beings to bend other humans to their will and a failure to “do the [right thing] to the right person, to the right

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⁶ Alexander, *Prydain Chronicles*, 566.

⁷ Ibid.


⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II Chapter 8 §1109a 26-29.
extent, at the right time." Evil itself has no agency, but it comes from ordinary mortal humans who wield magic for their own ends.

Taran and his companions battle Arawn and his terrible black cauldron that turns the dead into lifeless slaves, similar to the silent warriors Simon Tregarth faces in *The Witch World*. Prince Gwydion, the hero who rescues Taran from the Horned King in the first volume of the series, explains that the Horned King casts into the cauldron soldiers who have fallen on the battlefield. The Prince explains:

> Arawn steals [their bodies] from their resting places in the long barrows. It is said he steeps them in a cauldron to give them life again -- if it can be called life. Like death, they are forever silent; and their only thought is to bring others to the same bondage.

The Horned King steals the dead from their resting places, strips them of their will and freedom, and uses them to wage war against the people of Prydain. The Horned King’s victims “emerge implacable as death itself, their humanity forgotten. Indeed, they are no longer men but weapons of murder in thrall to Arawn forever.” Here, again, in the motif of silent, obedient legions of warriors who have no freedom or will of their own, American’s greatest fear is realized. Not only does evil strip individuals of freedom and identity, but it enslaves them as well. Also in this image is reflected the contemporaneous American perception of citizens behind the Iron curtain who were slaves to their government and ready weapons against the West.

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10 Aristotle, *Nicomachean*, §1109a 26-29


12 Ibid., 148.
As the story progresses, Alexander deploys Satan-like imagery to demonize Arawn. He shape-shifts into the form of a snake. His servants assume the form of inhuman beasts.\textsuperscript{13} His goal is to enslave the living and the dead, and all the animals and creatures of creation forever.\textsuperscript{14} Despite his use of demonic imagery, Alexander never asserts that Arawn is anything other than human. Through his use of magic, he found the secret to overcome death to make himself immortal. He is not a force of nature or a supernatural being, and, though he is no longer mortal, he remains human. In his war against the people of Prydain, evil does not act through him, but is a result of his choices.

Alexander drives home the idea that evil is a result of human choice in the final volume of the series, \textit{The High King}. When those allied with Tarran finally have defeated Arawn, the Kingdom of Prydain returns to peace, and Taran and his beloved Eilonwy are raised to the throne. Taran’s guides throughout the series, Dallben and Gwydion, must leave Prydain because as Dallben explains, with Taran’s fulfillment of the prophecy laid on him, “all enchantments shall pass away, and men unaided guide their own destiny.”\textsuperscript{15} Magic, which has served both evil and good will end. Humankind must face its future without it.

As he says his farewells, Gwydion gives Taran the sword \textit{Dyrnwyn}. The sword, Taran knows, could only be drawn by one “…of noble worth, to rule with justice, to strike down evil…[to] slay even the Lord of Death.” Confused Taran exclaims, ““Arawn

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 17, 31, and 118.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 599.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 689.
is slain…Evil is conquered and the blade’s work done.”  

In Gwydion’s response lies the key to Alexander’s theory of evil. Alexander writes:

“Evil conquered?” said Gwydion “You have learned much but learn this and hardest of lessons. You have conquered only the enchantments of evil. That was the easiest of your tasks, only a beginning, not an ending. Do you believe evil itself to be so quickly overcome? Not so long as men still hate and slay each other, when greed and anger goad them. Against these even a flaming sword cannot prevail, but only that portion of good in all men’s hearts whose flame can never be quenched.”

Taran’s question and Gwydion’s response rejects the idea that evil has an ontological existence. It is not, Gwydion asserts, a demon or a force that has power of its own, but a product of the human heart motivated by greed, hate, anger, and a drive for power.

Alexander here reaffirms Norton’s assertion in the last volumes of her Witch World series: evil resides in human choices. With Gwydion’s closing statement, Alexander drives home the idea and ensures that young people know that evil exists in their individual choices. In the tradition of Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, and Hegel, actions have consequences, but reason leads an individual to right action for both oneself and one’s community.

Alexander’s work reflects a shift in the portrayal of evil during the era spanning from 1960 to 1990. Like Americans who had witnessed the horror of evil perpetrated by their own military, Soviet expansion no longer seemed to represents the height of evil.

16 Ibid., 700.

17 Ibid.

18 In Chapter 6, I discuss Andre Norton’s Witch World series. The last volume of that series, The Sorceress of the Witch World was published in the same year as Alexander’s The High King, discussed above. Many of the novels published between 1965 and 1989 reflect a similar perception concerning evil. The concept that evil has a supernatural nature does not disappear for good, however. As I describe in Chapter 7, in my discussion of Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson’s epic series, The Wheel of Time, evil as a force working in the universe returns in that series.
American soul searching, reflecting on the horrors of Vietnam and domestic troubles of
the late 1960s and 1970s, manifests itself in Alexander’s portrayal of evil as the result of
human action. Continuing this trend, Ursula Le Guin’s Earthsea Cycle explores the
shadow side of the human soul.

**Ursula Le Guin and the Earthsea Cycle**

Ursula Le Guin wrote the six volumes of her enormously popular Earthsea
Cycle¹⁹ over a period of 33 years. This award winning series spans seventy years in the
life of Ged, the Archmage of Earthsea, and numerous other characters as they struggle
with power, justice, the quest for forbidden knowledge, and immortality.

Throughout Le Guin’s series, characters hunt for the cause of the ruin of Earthsea,
just as Americans searched for solutions to problems that plagued America through the
1960s, 1970s and later. Although Le Guin attributes evil to a variety of sources, her series
reinforces the idea that evil results not from a mysterious force moving through the
universe, but from the individual choices human beings make.

In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the first volume of the series, Le Guin explores Plato’s
notion of an internal battle raging between the good and evil drives within each person’s
soul. Le Guin’s protagonist, the talented and egotistical wizard Ged, must learn to control
both sides of his character. Like Plato’s charioteer controlling the winged steeds of his
inner desires, Ged must achieve a balance between the noble and ignoble forces within

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him in order to survive. In this first volume, Le Guin explores the balance between light and dark that is essential to the safety and preservation of life in Earthsea.  

Early in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged acts without fully understanding the consequences of a spell he learned that summons the dead. In doing so, he releases his own shadow-self into the world. As his teacher, the Master Hand, explains to him, “to light a candle is to cast a shadow.” Every action, the Master Hand suggests, has consequences. By acting without thinking first, Ged has disturbed the balance between light and dark in the universe of Earthsea.

Le Guin’s portrayal of Ged’s actions adds a complicating factor to the notion that evil resides in human choice. For her, evil and good, light and dark exist together as part of a single concept. Le Guin suggests that it is in the balance between good and evil, and between light and darkness, that one finds meaning for both—one cannot exist without the other. Le Guin uses this image of the interconnectedness of light and darkness throughout her series. Later, in *The Farthest Shore*, the third volume, Le Guin uses the analogy of the front and back of a hand to explain the same phenomenon. In explaining that death is part of life and should not be thought of as a wicked part of creation. Later, after he has struggled with his own inner shadow side, Ged says, “‘Death and life are the same thing—like the two sides of my hand, the palm and the back. And still the palm and the back are not the same. . . .They can be neither separated nor mixed.’”

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20 The image of balance Le Guin employs throughout her series also echoes Aristotle’s notion of the median between one’s desires and one’s needs. It is Ged’s failure to control his desire to prove himself a powerful wizard that makes Plato’s imagery so appropriate.


In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Le Guin establishes that evil lies in the human heart through the ordeal Ged undergoes as he seeks to right the imbalance he has created by releasing “the Powers of unlife,” summoned from Ged’s own soul. Archmage Nemmerle explains:

Uncalled [this Power of unlife] came from a place where there are no names. Evil, it wills to work evil through you. The power you had to call it gives it power over you: you are connected. It is a shadow of your arrogance, the shadow of your ignorance, the shadow you cast. Has a shadow a name?  

Only later does Ged recognize and name this shadow. Le Guin writes:

Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow’s name and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: “Ged.” And the two voices were one voice. Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff, and took hold of his shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one.  

Ged faces this shadow and defeats it only by naming it for what it is: an essential part of himself.  

Released during the tumultuous years of the 1960s, Le Guin’s first novel and its exploration of the consequences of action and balance, subverted the rhetoric of America’s confrontation with the Soviet Union as one of American good versus Soviet evil. Le Guin’s novels bring new resonance to the discourse, contradicting American notions of itself and seeking to return Americans to a truer understanding of their place in the world. Like her immature and untried wizard, Ged, Americans struggled to

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24 Ibid.  
25 Ibid., 179.
understand the power they controlled while trying not to destroy the world. Like Ged, it is only by looking inward, and recognizing the shadow side of oneself, of power, that Americans can restore the balance in their souls and the world they face.

Throughout the series, and especially in the second volume, *The Tombs of Atuan*, Le Guin acknowledges the existence of powers beyond human understanding. In liberating the young priestess Tenar from service to gods known to the people of Atuan as the Nameless Ones, Ged asserts that the gods do indeed exist. But it is not they who hold power. Such creatures of the darkness have no power except over the human imagination. The forces that reside in the darkness of the tombs where Tenar is held as a slave embody the “ancient and holy Powers of the Earth before the Light.”26 Because of human knowledge, the forces of darkness no longer have anything to give to human beings. He comforts her by saying that the gods she served “‘have no power of making. All their power is to darken and destroy…They should not be denied nor forgotten, but neither should they be worshiped.’”27 Darkness is powerless outside the human soul. The Nameless Ones are part of life, but not a force in it. He affirms to her that, just as the Earth has both light and darkness, joy and sorrow, good and evil will always exist side by side; as will life and death. They, as Augustine explained, are part of creation, a byproduct of human freedom, not a power in themselves. Only in their power over the imagination can they cause individuals to make choices with consequences that bring pain or suffering to the community, or to those around them. But, Ged cautions, to deny darkness, and its very real power over the imagination, is also to deny light.


27 Ibid.
In trying to counter the fear Tenar has of the gods she abandons, whom she has served her whole life, Ged explains:

The Earth is beautiful, and bright and kindly, but that is not all. The Earth is also terrible, and dark, and cruel. The rabbit shrieks dying in the green meadows. The mountains clench their great hands full of hidden fire. There are sharks in the sea, and there is cruelty in men’s eyes. And where men worship these things and abase themselves before them, there evil breeds, there places are made in the world where darkness gathers, places given over wholly to the Ones whom we call Nameless… the powers of the dark, of ruin, of madness….  

In this passage Le Guin expresses clearly her understanding of evil place in existence.

Evil comes with human interpretation of existence, not as a force in existence itself.

But, Ged explains further, that when the human spirit interprets events in the world as evil, we serve Darkness, the Nameless Ones. Those who worship and abase themselves before such tragedies of nature—a rabbit’s shrieks or a volcano belching out lava and death—that the Darkness and cruelty in the world are able to “prowl the labyrinth of their own self…[until they] cannot see the daylight anymore.”  

Evil is, and will always be, Le Guin asserts, a product of the human imagination. When people abase themselves before all that is “terrible, and dark, and cruel,” evil emerges. While Ged acknowledges that the powers of Light and Darkness exist—death, hatred, and suffering cannot be denied—he does insist that they have no agency in the world. It is in the souls of men and women who worship the darkness where no life or light can survive, that evil lives.

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28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.
Despite Ged’s assurances that evil is a product of human fear and cruelty, in the third volume of the series, *The Farthest Shore*, evil seems to be on the rise in Earthsea. The world no longer functions the way it always has. The King of Enland, one of the oldest royal lineages of all Earthsea, believes that the balance has once again been disrupted: livestock fail to breed, sorcerers and mages have lost their power,\textsuperscript{30} spells go amiss, and the words of the True Speech carry no meaning.\textsuperscript{31} Nevertheless, Ged assures Labannon, the King’s messenger and only son that the problem has not arisen from a pestilence or plague. Those are part of the natural world and cannot cause an imbalance. What has occurred in Earthsea has the “‘stink of evil’”\textsuperscript{32} that is part of “‘a web, we men weave.’”\textsuperscript{33} Ged explains to Labannan:

“There is only one creature who can [cause evil].”
“We men.”
“How?”
“By an unmeasured desire for life.”
“For life? But is it wrong to want to live?”
“No. But when we crave power over life — endless wealth, unassailable safety, immortality — then desire becomes greed. And if knowledge allies itself to that greed then comes evil. Then the balance of the world is swayed, and ruin weighs heavy in the scale.”\textsuperscript{34}

Evil for Le Guin is the overwhelmingly unbalanced desire for power over life, the refusal to die, and the greed and dysfunction that accompany it. Evil follows on the heels of human action, our thirst for knowledge that disrupts nature. When desire overpowers

\textsuperscript{30} Le Guin, *Farthest Shore*, 4.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{33} Le Guin, *Farthest Shore*, 14.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 46.
need, as Aristotle warned against, when one disregards the consequences of one’s action and asserts one’s will without regard to the will of others, a violation of Kant’s Categorical Imperatives and pushing Nietzsche’s Will to Power to the extreme, evil manifests itself as a disruption of nature. In Earthsea, animals do not breed, and the words of the True Speech, which produce Earth Sea’s magic, lose their potency.

In this third novel of the cycle, Ged and Lebannon confront the wizard Cob who has opened a hole in the land of the dead so that he can come and go as he pleases. In the process, the power of the making, which lies in the True Speech and gives all magic its power, leaks out of the world. Only when Ged destroys Cob, is the hole sealed. Reflected in Cob’s search for immortality is a growing confrontation with what Ernest Becker, Pulitzer Prize winning author of the 1973 work, The Denial of Death, calls “man’s existential dilemma:” the idea that one must live life as a fully unique and self-conscious individual in full knowledge of one’s own finitude. In denying death, Cob has denied his humanity. He crosses the barrier between life and death and so exists in a state that is neither life nor death. In the denial of his own humanity he can no longer understand the difference between good and evil, making and destroying. Like those who tainted the Power of Witch World by seeking knowledge in order to gain more power, the human desire to know that which is beyond knowing, and exist beyond life, breeds evil results and horrible consequences. By opening the land of the dead, the power derived from the True Speech of the Making which wizards use to work spells, drains from the

35 Ibid.

world and madness rules: “Villagers [kill] a baby on an altar stone, and … a sorcerer [is] killed by his townsfolk.”\(^{37}\) Life is no longer natural. As Ged explains, a good man is not one “‘who would do no evil, who would not open a door to the darkness, who has no darkness in him…”\(^{38}\) A good man, says Ged, is one who knows “‘that there is only one power that is real and worth the having. And that is the power, not to take, but to accept[:…”\(^{39}\) accept death as part of life; accept sorrow as part of joy, accept darkness as part of light.

In naming Cob’s pursuit of immortality evil, Ged asserts that death is not “wicked” but what makes us human. As Becker writes, “[Death] is a terrifying dilemma to be in and to have to live… a whole lifetime with the fate of death haunting one’s dreams and even the most sun-filled days.”\(^{40}\) Le Guin portrays the dawning urgency in American life that must find meaning and purpose in the endless round of life and death, war and struggle, anger, hate, prejudice, and pain. She offers no further solution than “acceptance.”

Finally, in the last volume of the series, *The Other Wind*, when once again the desire for immortality has tainted the human world, Le Guin asserts through her aged wizard Ged, that the evil Earthsea continues to experience has nothing to do with the misuse of power by mages or the search for life unending, but comes from a *knowledge* of good and evil itself. In this final volume, a young spell caster, whose power is limited

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38 Ibid., 180.

39 Ibid., 181.

40 Becker, *Denial of Death*, 28
to simple spells of mending, is haunted by dreams of the dead who seek to climb the low wall between life and death. Le Guin has used this image consistently throughout the novels as a symbol of the line between the world of the living and the world of the dead. In the land beyond the wall, the dead’s spirits exist forever “‘[in] the dust and dusk there, without light, or love, or cheer at all….’”41 Ged begins to puzzle out the solution to Earthsea’s problems of the restless dead by pondering the difference between the two beings in the world of Earthsea who know and use the True Speech, human wizards and dragons.

Ged realizes that dragons, unlike other beasts, use only the Speech of the Making, the True Speech “‘in which there are no lies, in which to tell the story is to make it be!’”42 In speaking only the truth, by living only as creatures of the natural world, dragons, he suggests, are “beyond” morality:

[Animals] do neither good nor evil. They do as they must do. We may call what they do harmful or useful, but good and evil belong to us, who chose to choose what we do. The dragons are dangerous, yes. They can do harm, yes. But they’re not evil. They’re beneath our morality, if you will…Or beyond it. They have nothing to do with it.

We must choose and choose again. The animals need only be and do. We’re yoked, and they’re free. 43

For Le Guin, dragons and animals cannot be judged like humans. Their existence and their actions cannot be good or evil. They merely are. She carries this idea further in her image of an afterlife of meaninglessness, suggesting with Nietzsche that even our own efforts to give actions moral weight is meaningless. For Le Guin morality rests on

42 Ibid., 56.
43 Ibid., 57.
knowledge of evil, on an interpretation of right and wrong. Le Guin echoes Nietzsche’s rejection of a morality that denies human nature, that denies human desire and need in this world—to “be and do”—and surrenders to a slave morality that postpones reward to an “other world.” Nietzsche’s heaven, “…well hidden from humans, that dehumaned, inhuman world that is a heavenly nothing.”

Dragons in Earthsea live to enjoy more life. Good and evil have no meaning to them. And accompanying their decision to live free of guilt and morality, dragons won immortality.

In exposing the emptiness of the afterlife, and seating the meaning of good and evil in human thirst to deny death, Le Guin suggests that good and evil are constructs of the human mind. Animals and dragons act without malice or judgment. They live. And in living, there is both death and more life. It is the human interpretation of the tragic and the exploitation of the weak as evil that has put human beings on a path of slavery and suffering, Le Guin asserts. As Ged explained to Tenar in The Tombs of Atuan, evil resides in the human imagination. It is our perception that brings evil into the universe and sets humans on a path of denial, and forces us to seek release from the yoke of death. Only in living is there joy. Only in dying does life have meaning. It is accompanied by sorrow and suffering, Le Guin acknowledges, but it is life.

Le Guin clarifies the notion that humans have chosen a path that leads them away from freedom and an unfettered life into slavery as the series ends with a confrontation between the dragons and humans. At the end of The Other Wind, the final book, the dragons, who have lived isolated from humans, return from the west to claim the lands.

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the humans have stolen from the dragons. Only in the dragons’ realm is immortality possible. Death accompanies the choice humans made when they separated themselves from nature and chose knowledge, ownership, and the crafts of human hands.

Through Irian, the dragon/human daughter of the oldest dragon Kalessin, Le Guin explains the trade men and women made that brought death into their lives. In the long distant past, dragons and humans once lived together as one people. But there came a time when both races realized that they had different dreams for themselves, so the two groups parted. The dragons wanted only to fly and to live freely. Humans wished to “[k]eep all things…to “dwell” in “water and earth.” They formed the Verdunan, the ancient agreement between the dragons and humans. Humans “received all skill and craft of hand, and ownership of all that hands can make.” Humans gave up the True Speech, and with it access to the land of immortality. The dragons departed to live in the west where humans must not go. Humans lived in the east where death haunts life. Humans soon discovered the suffering associated with toil and eternal death, and with their knowledge of reading and writing they learned the True Speech once again. With it they discovered how to defeat death. They occupied a portion of the land where the dragons lived in immortality, and walling it off, they created a place where the spirits of the dead could “join the undying world.”

45 Le Guin, The Other Wind, 215.
46 Ibid., 160.
47 Ibid., 238.
48 Ibid., 236.
In creating the land on the other side of the wall, humans broke the pact, provoking the dragons to attack Earthsea and creating a breech in the wall. What Ged understands intuitively, Kalessin’s daughter must explain. When humans chose to “dwell” and not to fly, they also chose the knowledge of good and evil. Like Adam and Eve of Genesis, it is not a desire for eternal life that condemns human kind, but a desire to know what God knows, to have knowledge beyond our ability to understand. Humans left behind living “beyond morality,” living freely, to don the “yoke of good and evil.”

Humans chose the yoke of knowledge, toil, and property, and so their lives are forever constrained by a choice—to live by means of death and destruction, in thrall to darkness, or to choose the light and live simply through love and death. In doing so, we choose the most human of all conditions: love bounded by the knowledge of death. Like life and death and light and darkness, knowledge also has two inseparable sides. Like Ged’s reference to the two sides of his hand: knowledge and ignorance “can neither be separated, nor mixed,” but live in perpetual opposition to one another. It is in this opposition that the importance of each becomes clear. Darkness gives meaning to the candle’s light. Death makes life valuable because life is all we have. And human knowledge carries responsibilities and burdens that do not bedevil the unconscious beasts.

It is clear from the first volume of her series that the source of evil in Le Guin’s world does not originate in activities of a supernatural being, but derives from daily decisions, both the mundane and the extraordinary made by humans. It is in seeking

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49 Ibid., 161.

50 Le Guin, Farthest Shore, 97.
forbidden knowledge and unleashing unintended evils, such as the inhabitants of Andre Norton’s Escore, or in the opening of Prometheus’s forbidden treasure box, that humans gain what the beasts do not need. Free from the knowledge of right and wrong, the dragons and the sharks and the volcanoes of Earthsea live lives untroubled by evil.

In Le Guin’s novels, human choices disturb the balance between light and dark by releasing their shadow-selves into the world. Using forces they neither understand nor can control, they open a path for life to enter into death. As the Master Hand explains, “to light a candle is to cast a shadow.”\(^{51}\) In this simple image, Le Guin reveals that it is only by confronting the evil in oneself, bringing light into the darkness, that a choice between good and evil is made possible. Only by acknowledging the shadow self and naming it, can humans restore the balance.

Although Le Guin blames the evil done in the world on human hubris, she simultaneously liberates us from an untenable notion of reward in an afterlife. By exposing evil as the burden of our knowledge and of the consequences of our choices, she enjoins us to be deliberate about how we live. As the souls trapped in the artificial afterlife of Earthsea step out of the darkness of the world with no life after death, they disappear into wisps of dust that shine for an instant and then are gone.\(^{52}\) But it is the final passage of the series that reveals Le Guin’s message of freedom. As Tenar and Ged contemplate the transformation of their adopted daughter Tehanu into her true self, the dragon daughter of Kelessin, they comfort one another, knowing she has regained a form in which she no longer is bound by human morality and death. In Tenar’s final words, Le

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 44.

\(^{52}\) Le Guin, The Other Wind, 254.
Guin calls to mind the exhilaration and joy of Nietzsche’s newly liberated bird in *The Gay Science*.\(^{53}\) Imagining Tehanu living beyond the boundaries of human life and death, Tenar whispers, “‘*O my joy, be free.* . . .’”\(^{54}\) Only by living as she was meant to live, can she truly be free of death’s grip.

Le Guin’s series spans 30 years of change in American society. Depicting the choice between knowledge and freedom as the source of our human bondage and evil, and releasing us from a morality based on the unattainable and unrealistic separation from ourselves as creatures of nature, as Nietzsche would, Le Guin acknowledges our torment as creatures of the world, and instead of condemnation, she seeks to set us free.

**Virginia Hamilton and The Justice Trilogy**

Award winning author Virginia Hamilton is one of the most prolific and successful authors for young readers writing between 1967 and 2004. Her Justice Trilogy (*Justice and Her Brothers* (1978), *Dustland* (1980), and *The Gathering* (1981)) occupies a unique place in the fantasy fiction I examine because, as an African American author, she wrote the stories from a position outside mainstream American culture. Her novels of empathy, conflict, and compassion exemplify how Michel Foucault’s methodology of discourse analysis aid in our understanding fantasy novels as nodes of meaning in a matrix of interconnected social, political, and historical contingencies. In addition, the Justice Trilogy tells a unique story, one which serves as a vehicle for interpreting evil as a

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\(^{54}\) Le Guin, *The Other Wind*, 262.
product of human choice, as its interrogates equity, justice, and power as experienced by
African Americans in United States at the time of its writing.

The Justice Trilogy follows the experiences of four main characters, Justice
Douglass, her identical twin brothers, Thomas and Levi, and their neighbor, Dorian
Jefferson. Each of these children possesses the ability to “trace” — communicate with one
another telepathically and to manipulate the actions of others. Early in the first novel,
much of the action focuses on Justice’s attempts to understand and fit into the lives of her
older twin brothers. Although Hamilton uses a traditional omniscient narrator’s point of
view, her movement into and out of each of the characters’ points of view mirrors the
fluidity that telepathy provides her characters. By allowing the reader to overhear the
inner dialogue of several characters at once, sometimes in the same scene, Hamilton
offers insight into characters’ motivation and feelings of exclusion or separation that the
condition of being Other causes. Hamilton demonstrates the usefulness of fantasy as a
mode of offering young people a shifted understanding of the reality they occupy.
Specifically, by penetrating the lonely and distraught consciousness of a computer in a
future version of a devastated and barren Earth, Hamilton demonstrates how fantasy
creates scenarios that realism, because of its strict adherence to consensus reality, must
eschew.

Thomas Douglass, the first born of the family’s twins, uses his ability to trace to
control the neighborhood boys’ actions. Here, again, is the image of character’s acting
without freedom or will that figures so prominently in numerous fantasy novels of the
era. When Thomas begins to experiment with controlling Justice, Hamilton opens a new
discussion in the portrayal of evil and ethics. By demonstrating the strength of will
Justice must exert to withstand Thomas’s power over her, Hamilton seems to suggest that she must not be held responsible for the things Thomas makes her do. Hamilton’s position as a member of a group of people who fall outside the American white-middleclass mainstream forces consideration of the role environment and circumstances play in culpability. Through the vehicle of Thomas’s mind control of others, she examines question of responsibility for one’s actions when one’s freedom is limited by conditions outside one’s control, such as poverty, lack of education, or discrimination based on race. Those who restrict freedom and opportunity Hamilton holds responsible for the evil done as a result of proscribed circumstances. In raising this question Hamilton undermines American notions of equality, justice, and freedom.

In the first volume of the trilogy Hamilton establishes the psychic connection between the siblings and their neighbor. Through Justice’s ability to trace, she discovers Thomas’s jealousy over the close relationship between Justice and Levi. Because of this jealousy Thomas inflicts mental anguish and physical pain on his brother, planting in his mind images intended to frighten and control him. Thomas’s bullying of his weaker twin calls attention to the inequities of power and its effects on the victim. His invisible manipulation of Levi’s emotions and actions operates as a dramatization of how privilege affects (socially, economically, psychologically, and politically) those who are Other.

Thomas controls Levi by giving him visions of his brain “[resting] in a pot over a fire,” or drowning in a giant cup of water. He manipulates his thinking to believe he is

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56 Ibid., 125.
weak and ignorant, because he cannot break free of Thomas’s control. “Thomas’s strength over [Levi] weakened his nerve and damaged his will.” Hamilton’s scenario deftly elucidates the African American experience in the United States with respect to white power and privilege. The fear, frustration and pain caused by the manipulation of powers outside one’s control have very real effects on the individual. Furthermore, when Thomas forces all the boys in the neighborhood to follow his commands, moving them according to the beat of a drum, and to writhe in the grass like snakes, Hamilton employs mind control as a metaphor for white power. By his invisibly control of the boys’ during the Great Snake Race, she exposes how power forces individuals to submit to external control of their actions and bodies. Hamilton subtly dramatizes how white privilege suppresses, manipulates, subjugates, and humiliates African Americans in U.S. society. Furthermore, Hamilton calls attention to the ways that society diminishes African American agency by punishing Thomas for the exercise of his power: Justice and the neighborhood boys ostracize Thomas and, throughout the novels, question his loyalty to the others. By using tracing as a metaphor for white privilege, Hamilton subtly criticizes a system that openly grants some members more power and privilege than others. She calls attention to the invisible network of power relations in which white society controls the African American community and its negative effects on that community.

Hamilton later establishes that Justice, too, can enter other’s minds, and that her power is even stronger than Thomas’s. With her newly found ability she anonymously

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 53-55, 58.
59 Ibid., 186-187.
fights Thomas’s acts of brutality. When she shields her brother and the other children of the neighborhood from Thomas, Hamilton calls her “the Watcher.” In this role she challenges Thomas’s power. When Thomas realizes the Watcher is Justice, he tempts her saying “‘think what we could do if we were to join forces...’” Hamilton portrays Thomas and his power as Satan or Judas, and Justice as the savior or Moses who later leads a bedraggled and powerless band of children they encounter in the second novel out of the desert. In that volume, Dustland, Thomas betrays the group, now called the Unit, by withdrawing his power from their effort at traveling through time, and jeopardizing their chances of returning home.

Throughout the first two novels Hamilton continues to assert that Thomas acts according to his own will. No external force manipulates him. Hamilton continues other novelists’ understanding of evil as grounded in human decisions. Nevertheless, Hamilton continues to question one’s freedom to choose right action when invisible forces—Thomas’s and Justice’s ability to trace—control one’s actions.

When Justice resists Thomas’s temptation to join forces with him, Thomas senses that a different kind of force, “‘the Watcher,’” is monitoring and controlling Justice. Thomas warns the Watcher to stay out of their affairs. He demands that this mysterious consciousness give Justice the ability to act freely. The Watcher responds, “‘THE WAY YOU ALLOW LEVI FREEDOM TO CHOOSE?’” The Watcher accuses Thomas of

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60 Ibid., 135.

61 Ibid., 159. Hamilton uses italics to indicate when her characters are tracing with one another.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid. (emphasis in the original).
restricting the siblings and the neighborhood boys’ choices and in doing so indicts white society’s control over the African American community.

Here, also, Hamilton raises questions about responsibility that has been absent in other authors’ use of beings manipulated by outside forces. She questions culpability for evil actions and responsibility for good actions when one’s decisions are proscribed, and one’s life is not under one’s own control. Hamilton’s position outside the mainstream culture makes such an interrogation possible, but also urgent. Although African Americans had made some strides due to the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act of the 1960s, progress was painfully slow and many African Americans continued to occupy the position of the Other in U.S. society at the time her works were published.64

Once Justice brings Thomas under her influence, she discovers that by working together, the four of them, Justice, Levi, Thomas, and Dorian, now called the “Unit,” can travel to the future. However, the Unit’s safety, as well as each individual in it, requires the cooperation of all four of the children. Without each one’s concentrated effort, the Unit is powerless and vulnerable.

Unsure why the Unit has come about, Justice believes that their purpose, whatever it may be, lies in a different time. By clasping hands while encircling an ancient cottonwood tree, the Unit travels to the future. There they find a desert wasteland that they call Dustland. Cloned humans who are exact duplicates of one another, as well as horrifically mutated humans, some with three legs, and unnaturally sentient animals inhabit Dustland’s desert. Like Holder Carlsen in Three Hearts and Three Lions, and

Simon Tregarth and the Tregarth triplets in the Witch World Series, the Unit must discover the reason for their displacement in time. They come to believe that they must solve the horrors they find in the future. Through impossible scenarios Hamilton uses fantasy to shed light that subtly reflects the consensus reality of her readers as did other writers before her. Holger Carlsen must defeat forces that would exploit and enslave the powerless. The Tregarths must stand against those whose corruption of the Power threatens the survival of those who would use it for the good. In Hamilton’s story, Justice realizes that the Unit’s ability to trace and time travel means that they are “needed. Not now, but in another place and time.” When the children journey to the future they find pain, suffering, and destruction resulting from human meddling with nature and the exhaustion of the planet’s resources. As her characters explore the future for a way to aid the creatures they find there, Hamilton also requires Americans of the 1970s and 1980s to examine the impact our society has on people and the planet.

In Dustland, the unit attempts to make life better for the creatures of the future. They create a pool of clean water, and although it is intended as a gift, the pond causes changes in the society that the Unit could not foresee. Previously isolated packs of creatures begin to battle for control of the pool. As with Norton’s exploration of human hubris in Escore, Hamilton points to power exercised without a full awareness of the consequences of its use—human ignorance and arrogance—as the source of evil in the world, even when it is the intentions were good.

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65 Ibid., 216.
As the Unit explores Dustland, they befriend alien beings. They also come into contact with a malignant force they name “Mal.” Its touch on their minds leaves behind a sensation of something “unspeakable, malevolent…and deadly.”66 In confronting this evil force, the unit discovers that Mal is “energy, blind energy, light’s darkest side.”67 This unfamiliar and unexplainable presence, the opposite of the life-giving force of the sun and light, Hamilton describes as the source of illness in the creatures of Dustland. As in Le Guin’s discussion of the inseparable nature of life and death, light and dark, here Hamilton calls on the imagery of blindness to convey the notion that even light can cause negative effects.

In contrast to the powerless and vulnerable creatures the children meet in the future, Mal causes fear and nausea in all the beings of Dustland. Writing as an African American, from a position outside mainstream American culture, Hamilton’s mistrust of power is mirrored in the image she paints of this ambiguous force that sweeps in unexpectedly and causes chaos and confusion. Hamilton further plants seeds of mistrust and invasion when Justice comes to understand that whatever Mal wants, it “doesn’t want [them] disturbing things.”68 Hamilton’s fantasy again subverts the status quo of both the novel’s world and world of the novel’s readers. In a community that has no power, power is suspect. Mal’s power, despite its association with light and energy, represents raw indiscriminant suffering. Justice’s desire to free her new friends in the


67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 158.
future from Mal’s menace sends the Unit back to Dustland time and time again in an attempt to solve the problems they find there.

In *The Gathering*, volume three of the series, Hamilton introduces a new means of confronting evil beyond the solutions proposed by other writers. Instead of resorting to military strength or manipulation of magic, in Justice, Hamilton creates a new kind of hero. She represents a bridge between the heroes fantasy literature portrays in an earlier period and those who would begin to appear in the coming decades. Justice has no warrior skills. She is neither a swords woman nor military strategist. She is a young girl who calls upon her human ability to empathize, understand, show affection, communicate, and offer trust in order to right a wrong. When Justice leads the beings of Dustland out of the desert and finds a solution to their near-starvation existence, Hamilton’s novels begin to demonstrate a shift in thinking, not about what evil is, but about how to confront it. In the third volume of the series, we find early signs of Gadamer’s concept of crossing horizons, as Justice finds a way to hear the Other’s voice.

Dustland is a world of total desolation. There the Unit encounters tribes of young people made up of clones of three different individuals: a boy named Duster, who leads each tribe, Siv, a boy who serves as one of Duster’s guards, and Glass, a girl with whom Duster has a personal connection and is also one of his guards. The tribes live a subsistence-level existence by hunting the other creatures that survive in the desert. Hamilton drives home the deplorable conditions of the future writing that the creatures of Dustland “massed at kills [to drink their victims’ blood out of] the need for moisture.”

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69 Ibid., 61.
When Justice and her companions lead their friends out of the desert they find a remnant of human society called Sona. In Sona, the Unit meets Colossus, a machine built by the Starters, humans who fled the planet during the final throws of civilization on Earth. The Starters built Colossus for the purpose of solving the problem of survival but instead of offering solutions to humankind’s destruction of the Earth, Colossus built the Starters space ships with which to find a new home. Once the Starters left, however, Colossus realized that it had failed its human creators. The realization caused this unusual machine to become despondent.  

Justice listens to Colossus’s story and recognizes that the machine is experiencing regret, loneliness, and loss. As impossible as it seems, Justice comforts the computer, telling it that no matter “‘how brave or wonderful,’” or alien another consciousness is, “‘we’re only just human beings.’” Justice reaches across the great divide between the human and the ultimate Other, a machine, and offers an inanimate object empathy. Justice treats the machine humanely. By offering Colossus dignity and respect, she brings about the transformation necessary to rectify the suffering in Dustland. In doing so she discovers Mal’s source. “‘At the moment of Colossus’ utter despair when it realized its mistake of sending the Starters away, it fell to pieces.’” But, “‘one piece was strong enough to emerge as a separate entity. An opposite entity to Colossus. That entity is Mal.’”

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70 Ibid., 116.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., 128.
73 Ibid.
Part of Colossus’s objective, was to protect and tend the carefully preserved human genetic material the Starters left behind. But when Mal emerges from the wreckage of Colossus, it manifests only the part of the human mind that uses logic. It feels no remorse as it exiles to the desert wasteland the mutant beings who emerge when the human genetic material is cloned. The mutants do not conform to Mal’s criterion for human life. In this powerful image of a sentient machines, a living mind inside a computer, Hamilton demonstrates the power of fantasy to explore the nature of good and evil without condemning directly the society it reflects. Here, employing images of the impossible, two thinking computers, one empathetic and eager to help, the other malevolent and cruel, Hamilton personifies the nature of good and evil in her alternate world. Because both of these computers emerge from one machine created by the Starters, Hamilton suggests that, in its original program, humans recreated the entirety of the human soul: both mindless protectiveness and cunning cruelty. By anthropomorphizing this impossible machine, Hamilton is able to examine the division of the two halves of the soul and point to an imbalance between them as the source of good and evil. She offers the reader a warning that, like the front and back of Ged’s hand in Le Guin’s *The Farthest Shore*, the two halves of the human soul are inseparable and essential to the ability to maintain a balance. Without kindness, logic devolves into cruelty. Without reason compassion turns weak and ineffective. In Mal’s attempts to preserve life as defined by the Starters, it condemns those who do not conform to a lifetime of suffering outside human society. In Colossus’s strict adherence to its mission, preserve human life, lies the source of the sickness, suffering, struggle, and loneliness for those left behind on Earth.
Justice, however, carries within her the key to repairing this computer program run amok. The entity the Unit knows as the Watcher, which all through the novels has guided their actions, emerges from Justice and transforms Sona and Dustland. By asserting that empathy and justice must be a part of decisions made by Colossus and Mal, by showing them how to treat individuals fairly and compassionately, rather than as anomalous Others, the Unit liberates the future from an eternity of struggle and sickness. Here, then, is Hamilton’s contribution to understanding evil. Blind adherence to strict codes of conduct, even when they no longer order society and safeguard life, breeds pain, suffering, and chaos. Nietzsche’s voice, rejecting old distorted ideas of morality, echoes through Hamilton’s fantasy world. The ancient prohibitions of a slave mentality, personified by the blinding light of Mal’s uncompromising adherence to irrelevant and outmoded expectations of normal, and its refusal to recognize the mutant humans as life, have failed humanity. Justice and her friends bring new guidelines for ordering life and with them, hope.

Hamilton does not sanction Nietzsche’s rejection of Judeo-Christian morality, though. In contrast to Nietzsche, when Justice and the Unit reprogram the computer software that governs the future, Hamilton suggests that what is needed is a revision of the rules of society. When the underlying system fails to protect the least powerful and most vulnerable, the system must be reimagined. Standing in for Nietzsche, Mal condemns a slave morality that equates good with weakness and evil with the powerful. But Hamilton rejects American morality that, like Mal, is blind to suffering. She condemns a system in which justice and compassion are reserved for those who fit the definition of normal, whether that is white mainstream America, or a strict definition of
human. She condemns a system that is blind to its hypocrisy. When a system protects and celebrates one segment of society, she asserts, it condemns others to lives of deprivation and hardship. Mal manifests callous indifference to the suffering of the weak and the exiling of the Other. Such a system, Hamilton says, is evil.

Although Hamilton’s novels fall outside my parameters of works in which civilizations are at war with one another, her visionary work provides a glimpse of the struggle the Other faces when confronted by overwhelming power and limited resources. In addition, she foreshadows a movement in fantasy literature that will become more and more prevalent in years that follow. In this era of failed U.S. military expeditions overseas, and an increased disaffection of those outside the mainstream with the American political system, fantasy writers, beginning with Hamilton, imagine alternative means for combatting the evil they perceive in the world. Without wielding a weapon, but by relying on her most human of characteristics—empathy, love, and a belief in justice—the almost twelve-year-old Justice Douglass heals the future.

Evil in Hamilton’s fantasy world emanates then, not from the power of an omniscient being, or from individual choices. Evil, for Hamilton, rests on the collective crimes American society commits out of a reliance on reason, science, or traditional definitions of who is part of society, and a disregard for those who are prevented from participating in the benefits of that society. By depicting a world that fails to protect and support the Other, Hamilton condemns, and thus subverts, the values undergirding American justice and perceptions of the good. By depicting the United States’ mistreatment of the least powerful Other, represented by Thomas’s twin, Levi, and the clones and mutants of Dustland, Hamilton suggests that the system itself is broken. By
insinuating Justice, the girl, into Thomas’s consciousness, and later justice, the concept, into the functioning of Mal and Colossus, Hamilton demands a new approach to solving the society’s problems. Victory against evil, Hamilton insists, requires a healthy dose of human empathy, compassion, connection, and justice.

**Conclusions**

As Americans of the pivotal years between 1965 and 1984 confronted their own complicity in disturbing world events, fantasy literature explored new responses to evil. In imagining scenarios that investigate malevolence and malfeasance as the cause of suffering and struggle in their fantasy worlds, Alexander, Le Guin, and Hamilton blame human action and choice for the evil in the world. No longer do fantasy writers depict evil as an entity that lives outside the individual, but one that must be confronted within each person’s own heart. Evil no longer resides in the activities and designs of a supernatural being. Instead, fantasy writers require that their readers look inside themselves for the source of the suffering and pain they see in the world. This explanation is reversed, however, as American attitudes changed once again with the fall of the Soviet Union and a renewal of the United States’ dominant place the world. In Robert Jordan’s epic series, The Wheel of Time, evil once again takes on a life of its own.
CHAPTER 8

BEYOND SUPERPOWERS AND THE ARMS RACE: DARKNESS, CHAOS, AND FATE IN ROBERT JORDAN’S WHEEL OF TIME SERIES

. . . And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light . . . But whoever lives the truth comes to the light...

John 3: 19-21

The years between 1989 and 2001 prove to be pivotal to understanding the world born out of the ashes of the Cold War. In the aftermath of the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the winter of 1991, a previously bipolar world gave way to a new reality. Historian Stephen Ambrose summarizes the new environment succinctly in Rise to Globalism: “At the beginning of 1989 the Communists had been in complete—and seemingly permanent—control of Eastern Europe. At the end of the year, they were gone.”¹ And, “…by 1990 the world was no longer bipolar, except in strategic nuclear weapons.”² Even that was about to change. Early in December of 1989, President Mikhail Gorbachev and President George H.W. Bush jointly declared the Cold War over.³ Although the U.S. president would also proclaim the birth of a “new world order,” ensuing events from Oklahoma City to Pyongyang would contradict any sense of the word “order.” In the void left by the demise of the Soviet Union, America’s friends and


² Ibid., 369.

foes jockeyed to take advantage of the newly opened space. Rather than jubilation, uncertainty colored the inauguration of William Jefferson Clinton to the presidency in January 1993. That morning he proclaimed, “[A]s an older order passes, the new world is more free[,] but less stable. Communism's collapse has called forth old animosities and new dangers….” In the months and years that followed, the spreading chaos of ethnic and religious hostilities in Europe exploded in regions previously controlled by the Soviet Union’s tight-fisted reign. As Clinton predicted, freedom from Soviet tyranny meant renewed war between old enemies.

Into this era of change and uncertainty Robert Jordan launched his immensely popular and complicated Wheel of Time Series. In this chapter I explore Jordan’s 14-volume series. It is during this decade and with this series that a major transition takes place in American fantasy. Jordan’s seminal work bridges the divide between an era that glorified the warrior and the battle, and one that is desperate for an alternative means for dealing with evil and conflict.

Although it took Robert Jordan 14 years to plan and write the first of what was intended to be the six-volume series, the world he created in those first five books reflects a changing sensibility concerning the nature of evil and how to confront it. Jordan explores two sides of evil. In one, using the binary of dark versus light, Jordan personifies evil as the Dark One, a force with agency born at the moment of creation and rooted in

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the Manichaean notion of evil as an integral part of the Universe. Secondly, Jordan requires that each of his characters choose between living in the Light or working for the Dark. Jordan’s evil is rooted in the choices individuals make. Jordan’s novels explore both the depths of the human soul and a changing American postmodern theodicy—one in which the existence of evil as a part of the universe reemerges. Responding to a consensus reality that blames hurricanes, terrorism, AIDS, and economic hardship either on divine retribution or human-centric speciesism, the Wheel of Time series condemns both as the source of life’s agonies and the tribulations of fate.

**A Decent into Chaos**

American resolve to meet the challenges that were dawning with the new era declared by George Bush, Clinton, and Gorbachev brought with it the expectation of a “peace dividend”—prosperity from expanded international trade, increased government largesse from the decreased need to spend tax dollars on defense and security costs, a rising competitiveness of American products and human capital abroad, and increasing prestige garnered from the endurance of American democracy. It soon became clear, however, that peace was still only a dream. With the removal of the powerful Russian bear from the international stage Americans, it seemed, had a choice: either step into the role as the world’s policeman, once again, or retreat behind an isolationist desire to focus on domestic concerns and let the world fend for itself.

During the decade between the Soviet Union’s fall and the liminal moment of George W. Bush’s presidency—the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers in New

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York and the Pentagon outside Washington on September 11, 2001, the world seemed to descend into chaos. In Eastern Europe, ancient animosities kept in check by Soviet control disintegrated into ethnic cleansing and genocide. As the Soviet military withdrew from its client states, U.S. security agencies began to fear that rogue anti-American organization would gain control of Soviet nuclear weapon stockpiles, especially those housed in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. At the same time nuclear weapons and nuclear capable states proliferated. In Africa, along with the end of Apartheid in South Africa, the rule of law in Rwanda and Somalia collapsed as populations struggled to survive in the face of spreading violence and the withdraw of U.N. humanitarian aid and peace keeping forces. In the Western Hemisphere, too, long simmering problems required attention. Rivalry between powerful drug cartels, in South and Central America also erupted into violence and spread across the region.

In the realm of international health, HIV/AIDS cases worldwide reached a new high. On the economic front, new capitalist ventures in the former Soviet Union and its client states and the creation of the European Union meant increased competition in the world market for U.S. corporations and labor. Furthermore, home-grown terrorism against the United States increased with attacks occurring in Oklahoma City and at the Olympic Games in Atlanta. Tensions also rose between U.S. law enforcement agencies and anti-federal government groups such as the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. Finally, with the birth of the Internet, access to information exploded in what many would call a new Information age. At the same time the proliferation of news sites and other web-based informal channels meant that U.S. politicians and the military establishment lost control of information and message. With the decentralization of news
outlets, fierce disagreement over social, political, and international issues between Republicans and Democrats led to a contentious political environment in Washington, and vicious attacks against members of both parties. This setting further undermined American prestige abroad. In short, the disappearance of the Soviet Union as a common enemy resurrected long-suppressed political, military, economic, and ideological conflicts at home and abroad. Because the United States could no longer count on the Soviet Union as a partner in maintaining order, the American people faced new challenges of where and how to focus its energy and resources.

At the same time that the world was going through these spasms of change, young adult literature experienced a growth in popularity and an explosion of new titles. With the success of British author J.K. Rowling’s immensely popular Harry Potter Series, the publishing industry recognized the lucrative market for books that would appeal to young people older than middle school, but not quite ready for adult content or reading complexity. No longer would the same “classic” titles continue to top the list of the most purchased books for young readers. A new crop of writers emerged. Fantasy literature was one of the great beneficiaries of this new publishing landscape.

**The Wheel of Time and The Battle Against Darkness**

During the period between 1990 and 2013, Jordan (and Brandon Sanderson after Jordan’s death in 2009) took his readers into a world that matched the consensus reality at the time it was written. The Wheel of Time series depicts a world of a grinding,

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relentless decent into chaos. In the opening volume, *The Eye of the World* (1990), Jordan introduces the reader to a cast of characters who are fated to fight Shai’tan, an ancient and powerful force of evil. Throughout the fourteen volumes, Jordan and Sanderson provide insight into the nature of that force, and in doing so, they explore a multiplicity of themes, including the justification for evil’s existence in a world designed by a benevolent creator, the nature of time, freedom, and destiny. Jordan and Sanderson also suggest that love has the power to redeem one’s soul; that unfettered hubris threatens existence; and fighting and dying for a just purpose gives meaning to one’s life. Because in Jordan’s universe events reoccur in an unending circle of time, evil is not a force to be defeated once and for all, but a presence that must be battled over and over as the Wheel of Time turns. Faced with this overwhelming reality, Jordan’s characters confront deeply personal choices with potentially world-altering consequences that will endure for all eternity. In this single device, that of circular time, Jordan subverts American notions of agency, fate, and freedom.

Jordan’s series explores several important notions about good and evil that, while touched on in earlier works of fantasy, come front and center in the Wheel of Time series. Questions of personal culpability, raised in Virginia Hamilton’s Justice Trilogy, resurface as character’s struggle with how free their actions really are when faced with circular time. Furthermore, in Jordan’s work, the Wheel spins a Pattern that weaves together the individual lives of every person living or dead, much the same way that choices made by sorcerers in Andre Norton’s Witch World series had far reaching consequences beyond their ability to control. In a similar way, using the symbol of a pattern woven by time, Jordan’s story demonstrates how individual actions create patterns in existence, bringing
to life Michel Foucault’s matrix of interconnected meanings. Furthermore, as in Poul Anderson’s work, *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, in the intimately connected world Jordan and Sanderson create in their novels, only when all members play their assigned roles together and work toward a single goal can they succeed against evil. As one of Jordan’s protagonists states, “At stake [is] creation itself,” and, in the intricate, interconnected, fragile lives of characters of this fantasy, the reader finds a powerful metaphor for the modern, globalized society of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

**Fate, Choice, Power, and Love**

Jordan lays the groundwork for the trajectory of his story with the first pages of the series. In the first volume, the opening scene of the prologue reveals a palace in ruins. Corpses of men, women, and children lie scattered everywhere. Lews Therin Telamon stumbles through the wreckage of his home, searching the rubble for a woman, his beloved Ilyena. When his gloating nemesis, Elan Morin Tedronai, the Betrayer of Hope, appears, he restores Lews Therin’s deteriorating sanity just enough to allow him to understand that it is Lews Therin himself who has caused the death and destruction of all whom he loved. In the final frantic moments before he destroys himself, Lews Therin remembers that it was his own arrogance, believing “that men could match the Creator” that caused the weakening of the prison which held the ancient primeval force of evil, Shai’tan. In the volumes that follow, characters vie for control of the “True Power,” a

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magic-like energy that calls upon the forces of the five elements of creation—earth, wind, fire, water, and spirit\textsuperscript{10}—and wield it for their own purposes.

Shai’tan, whose multiple names include the Great Lord of the Dark, the Father of Lies, the Lord of the Grave, Sightblinder,\textsuperscript{11} and, most often, the Dark One,\textsuperscript{12} exists outside of time.\textsuperscript{13} It came into existence and was imprisoned by the Creator at the moment of creation.\textsuperscript{14} It exists in all possible universes at the same time, and is the “embodiment of paradox and chaos, the destroyer of reason and logic, the breaker of balance, the unmaker of order.”\textsuperscript{15} Shai’tan is the opposite of the Light which is the symbolic embodiment of Goodness and the Creator himself, a distant, disinterested, benevolent force that is all good and “shelters the world.”\textsuperscript{16}

In the opening pages of the series, Jordan hints at the very nature of the battle between good and evil that lies at the center of his work. Those who “walk in the Light”\textsuperscript{17} and those who serve Shai’tan play important roles no matter how insignificant they appear to be. With each decision every individual makes, whether to serve the darkness


\textsuperscript{11} Jordan, \textit{Eye of the World}, xii, 115, 632,

\textsuperscript{12} Like the Judeo Christian Satan, Shai’tan has no gender. Nevertheless, characters in the series almost exclusively refer to Shai’tan as “he.” Later in the series, as explained in a previous chapter, Brandon Sanderson use the pronoun “It” to refer to Shai’tan, as I do here.

\textsuperscript{13} Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson, \textit{A Memory of Light} (New York: Tor, 2012), 876.

\textsuperscript{14} Robert Jordan, \textit{The Great Hunt} (New York: Tor, 1990), 242.

\textsuperscript{15} Robert Jordan, \textit{The Dragon Reborn} (New York: Tor, 1991), 239.


\textsuperscript{17} Robert Jordan, \textit{The Fires of Heaven} (New York: Tor, 1993), 615.
or stand in the light, the universe moves closer to salvation or to destruction. No one’s choices are trivial. Jordan and Sanderson’s complex, interconnected universe reflects a growing understanding of the world as a web of connections and interlaced lives. By acknowledging that every action must be seen in relation to all other actions, and that every life must be understood as an essential part of the pattern of the universe, the Wheel of Time series brings to dramatic life Kant’s notion that all action must be measured against the doctrine that no individual will supersedes all others. Acting with such an understanding forces characters to examine and re-examine their motives, their role in the battle against the Dark, and their hopes for their world as they contemplate how to respond to Shai’tan’s looming threat. Each character must play his or her role in order to reseal the Dark One’s prison and for the Pattern spun by the Wheel of Time to allow all creatures to live free from bondage to Shai’tan.

Over the course of the series, Jordan and Sanderson follow the lives of dozens of characters. Those who fight for the Dark One, men and women known as the Forsaken, serve Shai’tan’s efforts to enslave all humankind. In exchange for power and immortality, the Forsaken have pledged their lives and souls to the service of the Dark One for eternity. The Dark One’s ranks are also filled with creatures called Shadowspawn, beings out of nightmares: Myrddraal, wraithlike “halfmen” who exist in between time and space, and Trollocs, hybrid human and beast creatures who eat the dead and are the product of experiments to combine human and animal substances.\(^{18}\) Once again, as in Andre Norton’s, Le Guin’s, and Virginia Hamilton’s worlds, the human search for forbidden

\(^{18}\) Patterson, *The World of Robert Jordan*, 53.
knowledge and humankind’s belief in its ability to manipulate creation in a bid to rival the powers of the Creator, bring creatures that perpetrate evil into the world. As 21st century science manipulates genes and disturbs the balance of the planet’s delicate ecosystem through environmental degradation and genetic manipulation, Jordan and Sanderson’s series places the origins of evil in human hubris and thirst for power echoing a literary tradition extending back to Genesis.

Against the Forsaken and their hordes of Shadowspawn, stand Jordan’s reluctant hero, Rand al’Thor, and his four friends, Perrin Aybara, Matrim Cauthon, Egwene al’Vere, and Nynaeve al’Meara. Early in the first volume these young people from Edmond’s Field, a pastoral village in a western province of the Kingdom of Andor, discover that something evil has stirred in the universe. Horrific creatures straight from forgotten legends—Myrddraal and Trollocs—attack their homes. The invaders are the agents of Ba’alzamon, a Forsaken who is the reincarnated Elan Morin Tedronai, Lews Therin’s nemesis in the series’ prologue. These Shadowspawn search for a child who, an ancient prophecy foretells, will be the reincarnation of the Lews Therin and whose destiny is either to break the world or to save it. Shai’tan’s servants seek to turn the child to serve Shai’tan or kill him. The Myrdraal and Trollocs destroy Edmond’s Field, but the friends escape with the aid of an Aes Sedai named Moiraine Sedai and her Warder, a personal guardian, named Lan Mandragoran.

Aes Sedai, too, are characters of legend. They are an order of women who “channel” saidar, or the One Power, the female side of the True Power, which only women can use. Moraine’s presence in Edmond’s Field is no coincidence. She and Lan also search for the child of the prophecy. Their goal, however, is to protect him.
Through much of the first volume, the Edmond’s Fielders know nothing of the central role they will play in the prophesized “Last Battle” between the forces of Dark and those of the Light. As each of them moves inexorably toward his or her destined role in the battle against Shai’tan, Jordan deftly explores the intricate relationship between good and evil and the impossible task of knowing one’s role in aiding or confronting them. As did many authors before them, by personifying good and evil as entities in the world to be battled with one’s life, Jordan and Sanderson demonstrate fantasy’s flexibility as a tool for exploring the complex nature of ethical behavior and evil. In the universe of the Wheel of Time series, by giving evil an ontological presence and making it the focus of the protagonists’ struggle, the issues of life and death, hope and despair, kindness and selfishness are brought graphically to life. As fantasy writer Laini Taylor writes, “Fantasy lets us slip into the skin of characters grappling with great power and the destinies that come with it.”19 With existence itself poised on the outcome of Jordan’s Last Battle, the decisions each person makes in this intricately connected world forces the individual to grapple alone with evil.

**Rand al’Thor and the Pattern**

At the heart of Jordan’s story is Rand, a foundling raised by a shepherder far from the centers of power and magic. Rand enters the series the consummate innocent. Unaware that he has been adopted, he knows nothing of the cultures of his parents or the pivotal role he will play in the battle against the Dark One. He knows little beyond the

farms and pastures of Edmond’s Field, where he and his widower father, Tam, are respected and trusted members of the community. It is clear from the opening chapters of *The Eye of the World*, that Rand loves and reveres Tam. After the Trollocs attack the al’Thor cottage, Tam, mauled and feverish, mutters about finding and adopting Rand as an infant, swaddled in the arms of his dying mother on a battlefield atop the ancient mountain where Lews Therin died. With his discovery that Tam is not his biological father, Rand’s foundation shifts. Suddenly everything he thought to be true proves to be false: Tam is not his father, mythical beings and heroes have come to life, and Edmond’s Field is no longer safe.

Rand and his friends begin a journey that will eventually force them into a confrontation with three of the Forsaken. In addition, Rand discovers his ability to channel, *saidin*, the male half of the One Power. As Rand knows, all men who can channel are doomed to eventually go mad because of the Dark One’s “taint” on *saidin* in retribution for using it to reseal Its prison. Over the years, men who channel have been hunted down and “gentled” by Aes Sedai in order to prevent them from causing chaos as they go mad. Rand slowly begins to understand the fate the Pattern has woven for him. In denial and fear, he stubbornly rejects the call to be savior of the world.

But Rand cannot escape his fate. He and his friends learn that they are *ta’veren*—individuals whose destiny is so closely associated with the Pattern that their actions powerfully affect all those around them. As they struggle against their destiny, Jordan suggests that freedom, or the possibility of choice in a world governed by larger forces, may be a lie. Expanding on the questions raised in Virginia Hamilton’s Justice series, the device of recurring events and the circular nature of time seems to relieve a person of
both choice and culpability. If Rand must ultimately play the role fate has spun for him, can he truly be held responsible for his choices? Is he, like Judas of the New Testament, a pawn performing a function in a larger destiny? Does he have choice in what he does? Over and over Jordan’s characters bemoan the role the Wheel has assigned them. Rand, Matrim, Egwene, Perrin, and others stumble toward their destinies while simultaneously attempting to reject the Wheel’s control over them. Each time Mat is given an opportunity to abandon his friends to the battle against Shai’tan he deliberately chooses the path that leads him back to the fighting. Perrin explains to Faile, the woman with whom he falls in love, when she attempts to talk him out of joining Rand’s forces, that it is duty, loyalty, and love for his friends that guide his steps. “‘[You] can’t walk away from what has to be done,’” he explains to her, despite his desire to leave the war and the heroism to others. In the Wheel of Time, however, characters affirm that, even in a world ruled by fate, individual choices matter. With every individual decision toward or away from Darkness, a Pattern forms. It is in Rand’s struggle that Jordan and Sanderson bring to center stage the question of freedom versus fate.

**Destiny, Reincarnation and the Possibility of Freedom**

In a 2004 interview, Jordan discusses this cyclical notion of time in the Wheel of Time universe. When one conceives of time as a wheel, as do many Eastern cultures, Jordan says, “change is impossible. No matter what you do.” Each volume of the series opens with an almost identical passage that highlights the fact that all that has happened

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will happen again. Jordan and Sanderson write, “There was neither beginnings nor
endings to the turning of the Wheel of Time.”22 This opening forces readers, especially
American readers, to delve into a concept of freedom and fate that is wholly alien to
Western thinking, a culture in which time is experienced linearly. Readers must confront
the question: If time repeats itself, can humans act freely?

Jordan and Sanderson make it undeniably clear that the major events of the series
—the resurgence of the Dark One’s power, the reincarnation of a hero to face It, the
coming together of nations for a Last Battle—have all occurred before. Adults and
children alike have heard the stories of these events in legends told as bed-time stories
and written about in histories. They live with the knowledge that, unless those who are
destined to play a pivotal role in preventing disaster do what they are destined to do, the
Wheel of Time will cease to turn. Siuan Sanche, the leader of the Aes Sedai in the
beginning of the series, explains that, “‘If Rand al’Thor is not there to face [the Dark
One] in the Last Battle, if the headstrong young fool gets himself killed first, the world is
doomed…Then fire and shadow, forever.’”23 Rand, it would seem has no choice in what
he must do. Jordan and Sanderson’s positing of characters locked by fate to perform a
predetermined role points to the problem at the heart of the story they set out to tell.
Jordan and Sanderson assert that if it is not the choice between good and evil that is key
because Rand has no choice in whether or not he will battle the Dark One. Whether or not
the battle itself is won or lost hinges on the reason Rand fights in the first place.

22 Jordan, Eye of the World, 1.
In positing a world that essentially eliminates individual choice, Jordan creates a scenario that mirrors the world in which his readers live—the chaotic and complex globalized world of the 1990s and early 2000s. As the only remaining superpower in the world, Americans seemed destined to spend the future battling endless wars against those who oppose freedom and prosperity. In Rand’s desire to reject his role as the Dragon Reborn who is doomed to confront the Dark One in the Last Battle, Jordan and Sanderson drive home this grinding sense of duty. Confronted with ethnic cleansing in Europe, the rise of warlords in Somalia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the expanding bloody battles caused by revolutionary forces and drug cartels in Latin America, and the rising perception of helplessness in the face of terrorism, Americans understood Rand’s dilemma. Like Rand, it would seem America was condemned to fight and die in the world’s wars, forever.

Jordan fully explores Rand’s doubts and frustration. Even as he begins to fulfill the prophecies told about the Dragon Reborn, his fear and outrage remain. He seizes the legendary sword, Callandor, meant to be wielded only by the Dragon Reborn; the Aiel pronounce him the Car’a’carn who will both break and unite them; and he wears the legendary Crown of Swords. Despite these victories, Rand continues to assert that he does not want to play his appointed role. Isolated and angry, Rand tells his father:

“My life isn’t my own. I’m a puppet for the Pattern and the prophecies, made to dance for the world before having my strings cut.”

Tam frowned. “That’s not true, son… I guess…I had some of those emotions myself, during the days when I was a soldier….A soldier doesn’t have a


lot of choices for his own destiny either….More important men make all the
decisions….”

“But my choices are made for me by the Pattern itself,” Rand said. “I have
less freedom than the soldiers. You could have run, deserted. Or at least gotten
out by legal means.”

“And you can’t run?” Tam asked.

“I don’t think the Pattern would let me.” Rand said. “What I do is too
important. It would just force me back in line. It has done so a dozen times
already.”27

Rand believes he is a puppet of the Pattern, no better off and no freer than if the Dark
One had enslaved him. Tam’s response foreshadows a revelation that comes to Rand
during the Last Battle. Tam asks, “Does it matter if you can run, when you know that
you’re not going to?”28 In Tam’s words Jordan and Sanderson point to the fact that, in
facing his destiny, Rand can choose the meaning his life, and ultimately his death, will
have. Tam continues:

The choice isn’t always about what you do, son, but why you do it. When I
was a soldier, there were some men who fought simply for the money. There were
others who fought for loyalty—loyalty to their comrades, or to the crown, or to
whatever. The soldier who dies for money and the soldier who dies for loyalty are
both dead, but there’s a difference between them. One death meant something.
The other didn’t.29

It isn’t the fact of the battle or his death that is ultimately significant, Tam asserts, but the
reason to fight and possibly die. In America’s reality, choosing to stand for liberty, and
the sacrifices that requires is the point, Jordan and Sanderson seem to say. Here Jordan
and Sanderson plant the seeds for Rand, and others who die during the Last Battle, to
assert a meaning for their deaths. In war, and battles against evil, when one has little

27 Jordan and Sanderson, The Gathering Storm, 1031.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 1033.
choice in the decision to fight or not, the choice to participate is not as important as the reason one fights. Some battles are bigger than ourselves and our “freedom” alone. Some battles are fought because it is the right thing to do.

Despite the prophecies about his fate and importance to the Last Battle, Rand soon comes to understand that his is not the only fate that matters. In the final book of the series, The Memory of Light, during his confrontation with Shai’tan discussed below, he realizes that the burden of defeating the forces of Darkness was never his to shoulder alone. The sacrifices and decisions of each individual, the denial of the Dark One in each person’s own heart, and each contribution to the battle is necessary to defeat the Dark One and reseal Its prison.

With time operating in an endless round of battle and death, each individual’s life, each thread, is essential to the Pattern. The knowledge that what happened before will happen again provides each character both an escape from responsibility for the events that occur, and paradoxically, a deeply personal stake in them as well. It is in making the choice to turn against Darkness, in contributing one’s life to the Pattern, that the good prevents evil from controlling the weave and turning the Pattern toward Darkness. It is in America’s choices to stand against tyranny, wherever it threatens freedom and the good, that alters the pattern of history and, as Hegel suggests, moves humanity toward reunion with the Absolute Spirit. Individual choices combine to form the pattern of an age.

His conversation with Tam forces Rand to confront the truth of freedom and duty in a world that requires sacrifices. Rand struggles to understand why the Creator would

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allow the same horrors to happen over and over. Alone, and in despair, Rand is determined to end his own life, and in doing so, destroy any possible future for the universe. As he gathers the One Power ready to destroy the world, Jordan writes:

Rand raised his arms high, a conduit of power and energy. An incarnation of death and destruction. He would end it. End it all and let men rest, finally, from their suffering.

Stop them from having to live over and over again. Why? Why had the Creator done this to them? Why?…

Rand cannot bear to be a part of a universe of endless suffering and death. Then Rand hears Lews Therin’s voice. Throughout the novels Rand has been conversing with Lews Therin in his mind and he believes these conversations are a sign of his growing madness. In response to Rand’s question, however, Lews Therin’s answer offers insight into Jordan and Sanderson’s understanding of the purpose of life. Sanderson writes:

Maybe. . . Lews Therin said, shockingly lucid, not a hint of madness to him. …Could it be…Maybe it’s so that we can have a second chance…

All was still. Even with the tempest, the winds, the crashes of thunder. All was still.

Why? Rand thought with wonder. Because each time we live, we get to love again.

This simple, quiet idea, emerging from within Rand’s own heart, holds the key to the struggles in the remainder of the novels and the ultimate defeat of the Dark One. The reason we live—whether once, or, as in the universe of Jordan and Sanderson’s characters, over and over again—is to love.

31 Jordan and Sanderson, Gathering Storm, 1060.
32 Jordan and Sanderson, Memory of Light, 1060. Throughout the series, Lews Therin speaks directly into Rand’s mind. In recording his words, Jordan and Sanderson use only italics to indicate Lews Therin’s voice. I follow that convention here.
Jordan’s series provides a new answer to the question of how to defeat evil and achieve peace in a violent universe. Evil must be met with love. Power, military might, or the ability to wield the One Power yield only more destruction and devastation. Love, communion, and freedom—the attributes of the Light—are the only possible answers to Darkness. Jordan and Sanderson deftly weave this idea throughout the series from the earliest pages and its importance grows in intensity as the Last Battle approaches.

**Confronting the Dark One**

As Rand’s world descends into despair and chaos, Jordan addresses the question of evil’s existence directly. An Aes Sadai instructor explains to Egwene, Rand’s childhood friend, “We all must confront the Dark One in one way or another.”

Similarly, when Perrin Aybara asks Moraine to explain how the Pattern could allow evil to exist, Moiraine says:

> The Creator is good, Perrin. The Father of Lies is evil. The Pattern is neither. The Pattern is what is. The Wheel of Time weaves all lives into the Pattern, all actions. A pattern that is all one color is no pattern. For the Pattern of an Age, good and ill are the warp and the.

In Moiraine Sedai’s response, we find the first hint of Jordan’s explanation for evil, which represents an older understanding of evil found in novels written before Lloyd Alexander’s and Ursula Le Guin’s novels. Jordan returns to a more ancient, powerful concept of supernatural evil. Once again, Evil, as embodied by the Dark One, exists as part of the universe, a force that works through the lives of men, women, and other sentient beings such as Ogiers, Eelfinn, Aelfinn, Trollocs and Myrdralls, and every

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33 Jordan, *Dragon Reborn*, 239.
34 Ibid., 378.
manner of creature called Shadowspawn. Evil has agency and affects the Pattern throughout the long ceaseless turning of the great Wheel of Time.

Jordan’s evil force, like that found in works by Alexander and Le Guin, requires human collaboration and choice to be effective. It is these choices that give the Weave of an age its meaning and pattern. Like the contrasting colors in a weave, or the opposite sides of a coin, each aspect of the binary of good and evil illuminates the other. Without a choice, neither side of the binary has significance. To know good one must know evil; As Le Guin’s Master Hand explains, “To see a candle’s light you must take it into a dark place.” In Jordan and Sanderson’s series, characters struggle unceasingly to carry a light into the dark corners of their world and their own hearts to illuminate their choices and their motivations, and to decide whether to follow the Light or the Dark. In each choice, with each struggle against Darkness, the Pattern of an ancient battle between good and evil is woven. Each decision made by every individual creates the fabric of the age. If those who serve Shai’tan dominate the Pattern, the Dark One will break the Wheel and destroy existence itself.

Jordan’s most extensive exploration of this duality of good and evil comes in Rand al’Thor’s final, climactic confrontation with the Dark One during the prophesized Last Battle. While humans and their allies battle below the Dark One’s mountain prison, Shayol Ghul, Rand locks swords with his ancient foe, Elan Morin Tedronai, reborn by the Dark One’s power. The Dark One has renamed him Moridin, which in the Old Tongue means Death.

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The two are frozen in battle and Rand’s consciousness leaves his physical body and confronts the Dark One on a plain outside of time. There, Rand recognizes that the Dark One’s control of the True Source is too strong for Rand to defeat. Rand realizes that his plan to destroy the Dark One is useless. He believes he has failed.

But then, as if no other battle is going on around them, Rand and the Dark One confront one another in a duel of their own. In the competing visions, they reveal the world as they would remake it.

First, the Dark One tells Rand, It will “SHOW [him] TRUTH.”

The “Truth” the Dark One reveals is a vision that forms itself out of the thousands of threads of the Pattern. In it Rand feels the soil and smells smoke from a village in the distance. Like the author of a fantasy itself, the Dark One requires Rand to believe what he is experiencing to be true. Rand sinks into the world the Dark One builds and, like the reader of a novel, accepts what he sees, even though he knows it cannot be real. The Dark One explains, “IT IS WHAT WILL BE” when It defeats Rand.

In Rand’s own world, a region called the Blight is an inhospitable land that harbors creatures and plants that prey on human flesh; where weeds and flowers are “stained and spotted with yellow and black, with livid red streaks like blood poisoning, and the air itself, smells of ‘decay’ and ‘tastes of spoiled meat.’”

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36 Jordan and Sanderson, *Memory of Light*, 812. In quoting the Dark One’s words, Sanderson, as did Jordan in earlier volumes of the series, writes the Dark One’s words using no quotation marks and in all capital letters. This intriguing device gives the Dark One a presence above the lives of the novels’ characters and above the story itself. It gives the Dark One a unique voice within the story universe until Rand’s voice assumes a similar presence in the story, as I note below. In this way Jordan and Sanderson drive home for the reader that evil does indeed exist in the fantasy’s universe.

37 Ibid.

One creates, the Blight has overtaken the rest of the world. As the vision unfolds, it becomes clear that no one there knows Rand because, the Dark One says, It has “REMADE THEM.” It tells Rand, “ALL THINGS ARE MINE. THEY WILL NOT KNOW THAT THEY LOST [the Last battle]. THEY WILL KNOW NOTHING BUT ME.” The Dark One has become the central force of the universe, and so human joy has disappeared.

In this first vision, the world knows only the Shadow. Evil, death, despair, and danger permeate existence. It is a Pattern of only one color. Without Light, the Shadow has overtaken the world and the creatures of the universe know only the Dark.

Rand struggles to exit the first vision the Dark One has woven, then proclaims, “‘Now I will show you what is going to happen.’”

Rand weaves a world of greenery and light, children and adults stroll down wide boulevards among the majestic buildings of a prosperous city. People of every nation work side by side in this Pattern. Workers and children laugh. Schools flourish during 100 years of peace. Rand’s vision contains “‘[h]appiness, growth and love.’”

However, as Rand wanders through the vision he notices a flaw. A “pinprick” of darkness expands, “engulfing everything near it.” To his dismay, Rand realizes his world is not perfect. He cannot eliminate pain, suffering, and death. He can only hide them. They are part of life, part of the pattern of human existence, because, as Sam Keen

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39 Jordan & Sanderson, Memory of Light, 815.
40 Ibid., 818.
41 Ibid., 851.
42 Ibid., 850.
explains in his forward to Ernest Becker’s *Denial of Death*, in continuing to live, life becomes a routine of “‘tearing others apart with teeth of all types.’” Life depends on death and Rand has tried to hide this truth. Into Rand’s vision, the Dark One’s voice intrudes saying:

**YOUR PARADISE IS FLAWED, ADVISER…**
**YOU THINK YOU CAN ELIMINATE SUFFERING. EVEN IF YOU WIN, YOU WILL NOT. ON THOSE PERFECT STREETS, MEN ARE STILL MURDERED AT NIGHT. CHILDREN GO HUNGRY....THE WEALTHY EXPLOIT AND CORRUPT; THEY MERELY DO SO QUIETLY.**

“It is better,” Rand whispered. “It is good.”
**IT IS NOT ENOUGH, AND WILL NEVER BE ENOUGH….YOUR DREAM IS A LIE. I AM THE ONLY HONESTY YOUR WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN.”**

Rand’s vision reveals Jordan’s own perception of evil. Death, hunger, and pain remain a part of life even in times of peace and prosperity. Shai’tan’s honesty lies in acknowledging that death, greed, and inequality exist side by side with life, love and generosity as Becker and Le Guin know. Peace is often squandered as men and women of power build monuments to themselves and their greatness, while those without power live and die and struggle, no matter what the powerful do. Jordan seems to want to remind us, the poor we will always have among us. Both Plato and Augustine would agree. In the heart of every human being, two forces compete to be given free rein of the appetites. Rand realizes that in his vision the Dark One cannot be so easily eliminated.

The second vision created by the Dark One offers still further insight into Jordan and Sanderson’s concept of the relationship between good and evil and a culture’s source

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of morality. In this vision, as Rand approaches Caemlyn, the prosperous capital city of Andor, he becomes leery of the Dark One’s “games. Surely,” he thinks, “this normal, even prosperous, city was not part of [the Dark One’s] plans for the world. The people were clean and did not look oppressed. He saw no sign of the depravity” he saw in the Dark One’s previous vision. To Rand, this world could be tolerable.

Rand approaches a peach vendor in the market. When a child steals a fruit from her, without a second thought, she kills the child. Seeing Rand’s horrified reaction, the vendor responds with indifference. She then threatens Rand, and he runs. He finds safety in a tavern owned by Master Gill, a man who was kind to Rand when he traveled through Caemlyn in the series’ first volume. In the tavern Rand questions Master Gill about the Last Battle. He learns that the forces of the Light won the Last Battle. Rand’s ignorance makes Master Gill suspicious. Rand notices something unusual, and when he questions the Dark One about what he has done to the people of Caemlyn, the Dark One responds, “I LET THEM THINK THEY WON [the Last Battle]…MANY WHO FOLLOW ME DO NOT UNDERSTAND TYRANNY.” In this new vision the Dark One’s control is complete. As Foucault explains in *The Order of Things*, the fundamental discourses underling a society’s power relationships effect its “perceptions, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices.” As the Dark One reveals in the passages that follow, It has removed compassion from this vision making the Dark One’s control unnecessary. Under tyranny, one’s subjects need not think. Their reactions are

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45 Ibid., 896.
46 Ibid., 899.
automatic and a part of the fabric of the world. They know no other way to live. When Master Gill attempts to steal Rand’s coat, Rand protests that the law protects him. Master Gill responds, “‘What manner of person are you, to think [that there would be laws against theft]? If a man cannot protect what he has, why should he have it? If a man cannot defend his life, what good is it to him?’”

Rand soon discovers that the tyranny these people have lived under is the tyranny of the strong. As Friedrich Nietzsche describes, in rejecting a “slave morality,” in which the strong are demonized, the Dark One has created a world that demonizes and rejects the weak. In this world, the Dark One has brought to life Nietzsche’s concept of the Will to Power, the notion that, “‘Exploitation’ does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will to life.” In the Dark One’s vision, men and women reject Judeo-Christian ethics that elevates the weak. It is a world with no compassion. As the Dark One explains, “COMPASSION IS NOT NEEDED,” if the strong are given freedom to exercise their strength for their own interest. In a contest of wills among the strong, the strong become stronger. Jordan writes:

Rand felt deathly cold. “This is different from the world you showed me before.”

WHAT I SHOWED BEFORE IS WHAT MEN EXPECT. IT IS THE EVIL THEY THINK THEY FIGHT. BUT I WILL MAKE A WORLD WHERE THERE IS NOT GOOD OR EVIL.

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48 Jordan & Sanderson, Memory of Light, 899.


THERE IS ONLY ME.  

In the Dark One’s vision Jordan reveals a world that knows only power. If the Dark One were to win the Last Battle and succeed in creating anew the universe in Its image, Rand realizes, there would be no morality, no good, or evil, only the drive to satisfy one’s own will to live. There would be only the Will to Power. With this passage in the final volume of the series, first published in 2013, Jordan and Sanderson offer readers a glimpse of life in a society of the strong, where weakness and innocence are exploited in service of the powerful. While Nietzsche’s philosophy on slave morality and the Will to Power have often been misunderstood, Jordan and Sanderson dramatize one possible interpretation of a world in which the western Judeo-Christian notions of the good do not exist, and morality is based instead on the idea that “might makes right.” In this vision of evil victorious in Jordan and Sanderson’s fantasy world, power is so deeply woven into the fabric of the society that good and evil have been reversed. Not only is weakness despised, but it is exploited for the benefit of the strong. Once again, as Foucault explains, power and cruelty are so deeply embedded in the society’s “perceptions, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices,” that it cannot even be perceived. Jordan’s portrayal of evil offers one possible avenue for a world in which a grand-narrative of power prevails. Writing at a time when the world had descended into the violence of terrorism, saw ethnic cleansing in Eastern Europe and Africa, the tyranny of Boko Haram and ISIL, and the bloody turf wars between drug cartels, Jordan and

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51 Jordan & Sanderson, Memory of Light, 900.
52 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, §259.
53 Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, xx.
Sanderson offer a vision of what transpires when the strong prey on the weak and nations abandon American notions of justice and equity. It is a vision of the tyranny of power unrecognized by those who live in it.

Rand, and with him Jordan and Sanderson, unambiguously reject this world of “No Light. No love of men.” For Rand it is a “true horror,” in which “everything beautiful” has been taken from the world. “Rand would rather live a thousand years of torture, retaining the piece of himself that gave him the capacity for good, than live a moment in this world without Light.”

In response to Shai’tan’s vision of a world with no compassion, Rand constructs a world with no Shadow, “a world that did not know the Dark One.” His new vision of Caemlyn shows children who know nothing of war and weaponry, only laughter and sunshine. Where “men could not conceive that one would want to hurt another.” Where the desert blooms, doors have no locks, and “there is food for everyone.” Only when he finds Elayne, the young queen with whom he has fallen in love, does he recognize the failings of this world with no Shadow. Her purpose, being a just and benevolent queen, has disappeared. There is no need to rule in a world with no injustice. Similarly, Rand learns that a second woman he loves, Aviendha, a woman who comes from a warrior sect known as the Aiel, has taken up nursery duty, spending her days, playing with children. Rand sees that while there is nothing wrong on the surface of this world he has

54 Jordan and Sanderson, Memory of Light, 900.
55 Ibid., 900-01.
56 Ibid., 937.
57 Ibid., 938-39.
envisioned, there is something deeply wrong in the hearts of the people he loves.

Accusing Shai’tan of altering Elayne, the Dark One replies, “DID YOU THINK THAT REMOVING ME FROM THEIR LIVES WOULD LEAVE THEM UNALTERED?”

Rand realizes that he has “taken from [Elayne] the ability to be herself,” the ability to choose the good.\textsuperscript{58} The Dark One taunts Rand saying:

I TURN MEN TO ME… IT IS TRUE THEY CANNOT CHOOSE GOOD ONCE I HAVE MADE THEM MINE IN THAT WAY. HOW IS THIS ANY DIFFERENT, ADVERSARY? IF YOU DO THIS, WE ARE ONE.\textsuperscript{59}

In a world of no Shadow, when no possibility of choice exists, human beings are as enslaved as when they live in a world without the Light. Here in Jordan and Sanderson’s series, brought to life is Le Guin’s notion that life and death, light and dark, joy and sorrow are inseparable. In a final moment of understanding, Rand knows that by eliminating the Dark, “he had created something horrible. Something awful. Something worse than would have been before.”\textsuperscript{60} A Pattern woven of only one color thread—Light—is no pattern at all and no better than one of only Darkness.

In despair, Rand slumps in defeat as he contemplates the realization that there can be no elimination of evil from the universe. Without it, the lives of his loved ones, and of all human beings, become an endless round of satisfying basic needs and mindless tasks. There is no desire for growth, nor satisfaction in one’s choices. Life in Paradise, Rand realizes, fails to fulfill the human longing to choose the Good. In Becker’s words,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 941-42.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 942.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
“Man needs to infuse his life with value, so he can pronounce it ‘good.’”\[^{61}\] As Aristotle and Hegel require, good comes from right action. The good, in Aristotle’s words, is “to do the [right thing] to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way.”\[^{62}\] In human freedom to choose right actions, we find purpose.

Returned to time and space once again, Rand surveys the battlefield below him. Many of his friends and thousands upon thousands of people have died fighting the endless flood of Trollocs and Darkfriends who seek to open the Dark One’s prison. Rand agonizes over the death and destruction. It is then that the Dark One shares one final vision with Rand, “ONE MORE PROMISE OF WHAT CAN BE. . .”\[^{63}\] Sanderson writes:

Nothing.
Rand turned. He tried to turn. He had no form or shape.
Nothing…. He understood. The Dark One was offering a deal. Rand could accept this . . . He could accept nothingness. The two of them dueled for the fate of the world. Rand pushed for peace, glory, love. The Dark One sought the opposite. Pain. Suffering.
This was, in a way, a balance between the two. The Dark One would agree not to reforge the Wheel to suit his grim desires. There would be no enslaving of mankind, no world without love. There would be no world at all.\[^{64}\]

Here then is the Dark One’s ultimate goal: the end of time itself. In this nihilistic vision, there would be no suffering, no pain, but also no joy, no love. No death. No life at all.

\[^{61}\] Becker, *Denial Of Death*, 155.
\[^{63}\] Ibid., 984.
\[^{64}\] Ibid., 992.
Uncertain, Rand contemplates the Dark One’s offer. For his battered body and his broken spirit, he longs to accept this end to his struggle. An end to the Wheel, to time itself, would mean rest. “No more burdens.” But in a final assertion of his will and a demand for love and life as a human being, Rand sees Truth. Speaking in a voice as powerful as the Dark One, Jordan and Sanderson now write Rand’s words in all capital letters. “NO, Rand said. AN END TO EXISTENCE IS NOT PEACE.”

At that moment, Rand’s life-long friend, Egwene al’Vere, having risen over the course of the series to be the leader of the Aes Sedai, faces M’Hael, one of the Forsaken on the battlefield. As she struggles with the pain of the death of her warder and lover, M’Hael flings weaves of balefire at the armies of the Light. Balefire is a forbidden spell, an ultimate weapon of the True Source that not only kills an individual, but burns his or her thread from the Pattern. Balefire unravels one’s very existence, and so eliminates a veritable lifetime of connections and attachments, and causes the unraveling of the Pattern itself. Forging through her grief, Egwene realizes she cannot fight balefire with more balefire. Recognizing in an instant of enlightenment that every weave, every spell has an opposite which counters it, she conceives a new spell. To combat a spell of destruction, she weaves a spell of creation. She counters M’Hael’s balefire with a “[a] fire of her own, a weave of light and rebuilding. The Flame of Tar Valon.” Her counterforce to balefire kills M’Hael and ultimately her as well. In doing so she becomes

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65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.


68 Jordan and Sanderson, *Memory of Light*, 1002.
the opposite of darkness. Egwene becomes Light. She embodies the notion that light and
dark are two parts of the same concept. She becomes a part of creation at the same
moment that she abandons it. Sanderson writes:

Her body was spent. She offered it up and became a column of light,
releasing the Flame of Tar Valon into the ground beneath her and high into the
sky. The Power left her in a quiet, beautiful explosion, washing across [her
enemies] and sealing the cracks created by [the Balefire of] her fight with
M’Hael.

Egwene’s soul separated from her collapsing body and rested upon that
wave, riding it into the Light.  

In a tragic dramatization of what Rand at that moment is contemplating, the Dark One’s
offer of the end of existence itself, Egwene’s sacrifice drives home the significance of
Rand’s impending choice. This powerful image of flame and light, of Egwene becoming
light itself, pierces the grief and resignation that has descended over all those still
fighting. It overcomes the perception that the Dark is winning the Last Battle. In a
dramatic affirmation of life and by making the ultimate sacrifice, Egwene asserts the right
to choose what her life and her death are to mean. She asserts that her life meant
something and so then does her death.

Rand witnesses the instant of Egwene’s death and believes he has failed. Standing
on the mountain of the Dark One’s prison, witnessing the death and devastation that his
failure to destroy the Dark One has wrought for those he loves, Rand hears Egwene’s voice.
She speaks directly into his mind from the void beyond the Pattern, saying. “Let go, Rand.
Let us die for what we believe, and do not try to steal that from us.”

Her death drives
home the injustice of Rand’s own vision of a world without the Dark One. Life without the

69 Ibid., 1003.
70 Ibid., 1119.
possibility of achieving one’s purpose is no life. Each person must discover for oneself what his or her life will mean. Life in a world where evil or compassion are absent offer the heart no choices. It is the choice that is key. It is choosing what we are willing to die for that give meaning to death.

Egwene’s spell brings light to the darkness on the battlefield. Her Flame of Tar Valon reverses the effects of balefire, repairing and creating anew the unraveling Pattern. By choosing to fight destruction with creation, she constructs a meaning for her death. For Rand, standing above the action, contemplating non-existence, her plea to let her share the burden of fighting the Dark One is transformative. In that moment Rand understands:

He looked into the place where evil was born. He looked into it and he knew it. The Dark One was not a being, but a force—an essence as wide as the universe itself, which Rand could now see in complete detail. Planets, stars in their multitudes, like the motes above a bonfire.71

Looking over the battlefield, Rand realizes that, “[the] Dark one was not a being. It was the darkness between. Between lights, between moments, between eyeblinks.”72 It is nothing. At this moment of decision concerning the fate of existence itself, Rand recognizes that the Dark One has no true existence. It is not a physical living being, but a form of energy that, like the Light, the energy of creation itself, gives life fullness. As he battles the Dark One for the soul of humankind he realizes that his struggle is not against death, but for the chance to live. With both light and dark as a force in the universe, life will always require choices. Without darkness, light has no meaning; without evil, good cannot be a choice. “To light a candle, is to cast a shadow.”73 Even light, has a dark side.

71 Ibid., 1020.
72 Ibid., 1021.
Other fantasy writers before Jordan and Sanderson concur. Whether fantasy authors personify evil as a force working to enslave human beings, as do Anderson, in *Three Hearts and Three Lions* and Norton in the Witch World series, or they portray evil as the work of individuals, as in Alexander’s Prydain Chronicles and Le Guin’s Earthsea Cycle, ultimately these authors assert that evil’s power originates in choices within a human heart—the choice of whether to turn toward Darkness and evil, or toward Light and good.

Rand and Egwene’s choices to fight, and possibly die, demonstrate that while darkness is a denial of life, it is not victory over life. By declaring death her choice, Egwene’s sacrifice robs the Darkness of its victory over her life. Her choice to die gives meaning to both her life and her death.

Returning to confront the Dark One with his new understanding of Egwene’s death and all the deaths of those fighting, Rand acts on his newly discovered truth. He screams at Shai’tan:

DEATH CANNOT KEEP ME AT BAY, AND IT CANNOT RULE ME.
IT COMES DOWN TO THIS, FATHER OF LIES. WHEN HAVE YOU INSPIRED A PERSON TO GIVE THEIR LIFE FOR YOU? NOT FOR THE PROMISES YOU GIVE, NOT FOR THE RICHES THEY SEEK OR THE POSITIONS THEY WOULD HOLD, BUT FOR YOU. HAS IT EVER HAPPENED?

The darkness grew still.

BRING MY DEATH, SHAI’TAN, Rand growled, throwing himself into the blackness. FOR I BRING YOURS!  

The truth Rand has discovered in the death and destruction he witnesses on the battlefield is that men and women serve the Dark One out of fear, hate, weakness, and pain, not out

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74 Ibid., 1074.
of loyalty or love for It. When those who serve Shai’tan choose death, they choose it to end Darkness’s hold over them. By becoming Light, Egwene opposed the Darkness. By choosing death, the forces that fight for the Light deny Darkness the use of their bodies and souls. Darkness, Rand proclaims, never makes one strong; darkness never inspires lives of hope or love. Darkness is a denial of life. But, as Egwene and all who have the fallen in the fight for the Light prove, to die while standing against Darkness is not defeat. Choosing death over Darkness is a denial of Darkness.

In the final assault, Rand returns from outside the Pattern, outside space and time. He struggles against his ancient nemesis, Elan, with whom his body has been frozen in a swordfight while his consciousness dueled with the Dark One. In one last desperate final stroke against the Father of Lies, the Lord of the Grave, the Sower of Despair, Rand drops his sword Callandor, the powerful sword used to channel the True Power, and that destroys those who attempt to wield it alone. After millennia of enslavement to the Dark One, Elan makes one more choice. Desperately craving the final peace of oblivion, and knowing that by wielding Callandor he will die, Elan chooses death. In a final assertion of his will, Elan raises Callandor. In that instant, Rand links with him and the two powerful Aes Sedai waiting nearby, and, drawing on the Dark One’s own energy, combines it with saidin, and seizes the Dark One.

…He wove something majestic, a pattern of interlaced saidin and saidar in their pure forms. Not Fire, not Spirit, not Water, not Earth, not Air. Purity. Light itself.

He understood, finally, that the Dark One was not the enemy. It never had been.75

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75 Ibid., 1125-26.
The enemy, Rand finally understands, is to choose Darkness; to choose evil. To choose the Light is to be victorious over darkness and death. Life’s victory is not escaping death, nor power for power’s sake, as the Dark One promised Its followers—or as some would imagine Nietzsche believed. Life must be lived purposely, choosing Light and life and the good despite Darkness and death and evil.

Rand grabs the Dark One across time and space, and in a burst of truth-shedding light, re-forges the Dark One’s prison. Darkness, Jordan and Sanderson affirm, as do Le Guin, Norton, and Augustine, cannot be eliminated once and for all, it can only be contained by denying it a home in one’s heart.

In victory, Rand proves the point that Jordan set out to address 10,000 pages earlier: that life is about choices. In choosing the Light and the power to create, rather than the power to destroy, one conquers Darkness. It is light that “shelters the world”\(^\text{76}\) light that brings justice,\(^\text{77}\) light that never gives up on any one and claims that “no man is so lost that he cannot be brought to the Light.”\(^\text{78}\) Light gives men the “spark of ingenuity that makes people into people.”\(^\text{79}\) It is light that illuminates the darkness. Evil lies in denying the Light. In Light there is life. It is in America’s choices to stand for freedom, justice, life and light, to battle the forces of hate, chaos, injustice, and death that descended upon the world with the rise of terrorism, and genocide following the fall of the Soviet Union that Jordon and Sanderson assert is what gives national purpose to our


\(^{77}\) Ibid., xv.

\(^{78}\) Jordan & Sanderson, *Memory of Light*, 357.

strength. Americans, like the reluctant Rand al’Thor and his friends, must take up the mantel of freedom and fight for the good, in defiance of the the Darkness. Only then does our freedom gain its greatest worth.

Conclusion

Jordan and Sanderson’s Wheel of Time series responds to a growing sense of despair, and meaninglessness brought about by rationalism and modernism’s rejection of an irreducible consensus concerning what is good in an era of violence, chaos, and suffering. In their dramatization of the ultimate battle between good and evil in the pages of their series, they offer a solution to a cultural malaise around the futility of life and acting for the good in the face of fate and an endless round of war, death, and evil. They reveal that the chance to love and choose one’s reason for living is why we live in the first place. Like Nietzsche’s demon who offers the possibility of experiencing one’s life over and over, exactly as it has always been lived, Jordan and Sanderson insist that we must take possession of ourselves and proclaim that we “crave nothing more fervently” than to live again and again. They show that in choices, even those proscribed by fate, evil is overcome. Jordan makes clear that the defeat of evil comes ultimately from each individual choice to battle and confront evil where it arises. As Americans of the 1990s and 2000s struggled with a sense of powerlessness in the face of a growing darkness falling across their lives and futures in the form of terrorism, war, and fear, Jordan and Sanderson refuse to allow the individual, or America, to abdicate our obligation to confront evil, from recognizing our impact on climate change, to living consciously as

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consumers of everything from tee-shirts to diamonds. In an environment as globalized and interconnected as the post-Cold War world, each individual’s decisions and choices, Jordan and Sanderson affirm, are central to resolving the world’s problems. Evil is out there and no one can shirk the responsibility to face it head on. Doing so gives meaning to our lives. Furthermore, the most powerful tool we bring to the struggle is simple human love.

In the following chapter, I examine how fantasy authors writing in the post-9/11 world extend Jordan and Sanderson’s suggestion of human love as a means to confronting evil. Using Hans-Georg Gadamer’s concept of bridging horizons, as suggested in Truth and Method, writers in the first decades of the 21st century search for a means to end the contempt and perpetual conflict that has made much of the modern world a killing field of hatred, irreconcilable difference, and war.
CHAPTER 9
BEYOND CERTAINTY – SEPTEMBER 11th AND THE WAR ON TERROR –
HOW FANTASY WRITERS MODEL HOPE, LOVE, FORGIVENESS AND
UNDERSTANDING AS A PATH TO VICTORY OVER FEAR AND HATE

Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known. In short, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.


By the fall of 2015, it has become cliché to say that the world changed on September 11th, 2001. A more meaningful and difficult discussion, however, is uncovering how deeply the impact of that day’s events penetrated American’s daily life and culture. Despite the fact that the strikes, like the planes themselves, seemed to come out of the clear blue sky, the attacks on New York’s World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon were the result of decades of negative and harmful cultural, political, and economic intercourse between the United States and the cultures and people who perpetrated them. I do not intend to trace here the causes or attitudes that led to September 11th. In this chapter I examine the cultural impact of the so-called “Global War on Terror,” the Invasion of Iraq in 2003, and changes in American perceptions of warfare (i.e. the use of drones, the use of torture, and the doctrine of preemptive war) have had on American culture as manifested in fantasy literature published since that frightening day.

In the works of the three novelists I examine in this chapter, Amelia Atwater-Rhodes, Laini Taylor, and Christopher Paolini, the images of war conveyed to young readers have less to do with the victory of good over evil than with the difficulty in
knowing which is which and how to approach the Other. If 21st century fantasy offers one common message, it is that war is Hell and no one is left unaffected by its barbarity and destructiveness. These authors, by providing glimpses into fictional worlds that have sought peace over vengeance, suggest that justice requires not penance or punishment, but reconciliation; that trust is the only way to find common cause with one’s enemy; and in boldly and freely seeking understanding of those with whom we disagree, one can find love and peace. These authors offer young readers reasons to hope in a world of confusion, barbarity, and violence.

For a nation staggering under the weight of a now fourteen-year-old war on terror in which the enemy is neither monolithic nor easily identifiable, fantasy writers suggest that war is an unsustainable means to settling disputes. Over the same time period African Americans U.S. citizens experienced overt Othering in the form of violence and exclusion. Fantasy writers responded by modeling in their novels paths to creating worlds of equality and justice. As one of Atwater-Rhodes’s characters pleads with the people of two kingdoms who have been at war for centuries, for the sake of the future each side must learn to trust one another: “The future,” she says, “is all we have.”¹ In the discussion below, I explore how fantasies published since September 11, 2001 demonstrate how to build bridges to the future through understanding, trust, and love.

**A Post-9/11 World of Fear, War, and Torture**

At 8:46 on the morning of September 11, 2001, Americans watched in horror as the twin towers of the World Trade Center, icon of American global financial might,

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came under attack by planes piloted by operatives of al Qaeda. Within an hour of the first plane striking the North Tower, some two hundred and thirty miles to the south, the Pentagon, the worldwide symbol of the United States’ military power, sustained a similar attack from the air. On that bright September morning, America’s perception of itself and its enemies changed. With the attack on the United States’ “Homeland,” George W. Bush’s administration began the process of redefining previously held assumptions about war, foreign policy, and domestic governance.² In a speech nine days after the attacks, President Bush went before a joint session of the United States Congress and declared to the world, “You are either with us, or you are for the terrorists.”³ According to Douglas Kellner, the George Kneller Chair in Philosophy of Education at UCLA, what followed in discussions on television, in newspapers, and in public forums around the world was a rhetoric of apocalypse and cataclysm. The enemy became a force of evil that “must be totally defeated, [and] eradicated from the earth if good is to reign. This discourse of evil raised the stakes and violence of the conflict and nurture[d] more apocalyptic and


catastrophic politics, fueling future cycles of hatred, violence, retribution and wars.”

America’s war on evil had begun.

By the first week in October, 2001, the United States launched *Operation Enduring Freedom* against Taliban bases in Afghanistan in order to track down and destroy al Qaeda’s strongholds in that country, and to capture Osama bin Laden, to whom United States intelligence organizations assigned responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. Within 18 months of the first military strikes in Afghanistan, the Bush administration, with the support of American allies overseas, expanded the newly declared “Global War on Terror” and invaded Iraq in a pre-emptive strike to keep Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from developing and deploying weapons of mass destruction.

Initially, the Bush administration attempted to avoid defining America’s enemy as “a single political regime or person or religion or ideology,” calling the new enemy “terrorism.” According to the Bush administration, those responsible for the “premeditated, politically motivated violence against innocents” emanated from Islamic extremists, making Islamic terrorism “the accepted primary strategic threat faced by the United States.” In an effort to construct the political will to unify American citizens’

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Wright, *Persian Gulf Security*, 7. The following characteristics distinguish terrorism from criminal behavior and acts of war in a just war. First, it is perpetrated against non-combatants. Second, it is perpetrated by agents not directly affiliated with a specific nation-state. And third, its purpose is to instill fear and terror in a population not directly involved in military activities in order to influence political or
support behind his war on terror, Bush used rhetoric that invoked historical
exceptionalism and appealed to American ideals of liberty, democracy, and national
innocence, framing America as a victim, all with the intention of associating the fight to
destroy al Qaeda as a war of good against evil. In his speech creating the Department of
Homeland Security, President Bush’s rhetoric and imagery cast America in the role of
global peacekeeper and the guardian of civilization. In his message to Congress he said:

    History has called our nation into action. History has placed a great
    challenge before us: Will America - with our unique position and power – blink in
    the face of terror, or will we lead to a freer, more civilized world? There’s only
    one answer. This great country will lead the world to safety, security, peace and
    freedom.9

With his pronouncement that the United States would not shirk its responsibility as
defender of freedom and peace, President Bush took his declaration after the attacks on
September 11th to the next logical step. He equated the United States, the defender of
human civilization, with good and our enemies with evil. America, therefore, cannot fail.
The “taking of [the terrorist’s] life is not only the sensible thing to do but,” now,
according to this rhetoric, it is “a moral duty.”10 As University of Nevada professor and
author of numerous articles and books on terrorism and terrorists, Joseba Zulaika
explains:

    …[Such] discourse is in itself the principal ideological construct for condoning an
    endless War on Terror with many thousands of causalities annually. The terrorist

social attitudes. See Wright, Persian Gulf Security, and Sulmasy, Legal Landscape, and Zulaika,
Terrorism: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, for definitions of a terrorist and what constitutes a terrorist act.

Day 68, no. 17 (June 15, 2002): 519, accessed June 11, 2015,

10 Zulaika, Terrorism: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, 36.
is the new legitimizing signifier (as was Hitler during World War II) that elicits, indeed demands, unbridled war by whatever means...  

With Bush’s announcement, the administration changed the discourse on terrorism. He declared it the moral obligation of the United States to destroy terrorism worldwide. Indeed Bush’s rhetoric went even further, equating Osama bin Laden with Satan, calling him the “Evil One.” By seeing the War on Terror and the Islamic terrorist in terms of a Manichaean binary, the rhetoric brooks no contradiction or dissent from the need to destroy evil. Ironically, the counterterrorism position, as adopted by the Bush administration and later to a lesser extent by President Barak Obama, mirrors the terrorist’s attitudes it considers irrational and despises. By matching the terrorist’s logic of hate, pronouncing its ultimate goal as nothing short of total annihilation of the terrorist, and justifying its actions on an ideological understanding of the conflict rather than attempting to uncover and understand historical antecedents to the attacks, the administration’s counterterrorist principles fail to take into consideration the terrorist’s motivations or capabilities. The system matches in ideological intensity the logic, which it despises and fears, and yet assumes in its own position.

The war on terror changed U.S. domestic governance as well, creating an environment in which the American populace tolerated the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the Patriot Act to monitor Americans and foreign nationals. By arousing citizen fear of the Other, in the form of radical Islam specifically, but calling it

11 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 28-29.
terrorism, the national security system encroached on previously sacrosanct American values, such as freedom of worship and expression and respect for privacy.

Another indicator of the degree to which the counterterrorist agenda has penetrated the American psyche and altered the American outlook on war and its conduct was the revelation of and subsequent debate over the torture of prisoners in Abu Graib in Iraq in late 2003. Instead of shock and a demand for a re-evaluation of the administration’s approach and conduct of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, commentators and public policy analysts, as well as public opinion at the time rallied behind the White House. The administration and military spokespeople asserted that incidents of torture were “isolated,” or, alternatively, necessary for American self-preservation. In the charged atmosphere, Americans seemed ready to accept torture.

Finally, anti-terrorist rhetoric of good and evil has effected how U.S. government agencies, such as urban police departments and the immigration system, and private businesses have responded to the African American community, immigrants, and others outside the white, heterosexual, Judeo-Christian mainstream by demonizing black victims of police violence and immigrants from all parts of the world. Commercial establishments demand they have the right to refuse service to gays, lesbians and


Muslims. These conditions reveal an American environment heavily influenced by the rhetoric that surrounded the war on terror and the dehumanization of the Other. During this deeply contentious moment in U.S. history, several writers published novels for young adults that portray societies fighting for their very existence. In the novels published in earlier periods, the battle to overcome evil aims at preventing a supernatural force from enslaving human beings or destroying the world. In the novels of Taylor and Atwater-Rhodes, published after the 2001 attacks on the U.S., two civilizations seek the annihilation of one another. In a third series written during this period, Paolini’s Inheritance novels depict the more traditional fantasy trope of a world torn apart by an evil king. What makes all three of these series interesting and significant is the way in which protagonists confront the Other. As in Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson’s Wheel of Time series, the solution to defeating the evil king or ending the combat between two competing civilizations lies in finding alternative solutions to conflict beyond endless cycles of massacre and vengeance. In these authors’ stories, protagonists from opposite sides of a conflict explore means to collaborate, understand, and forgive in order to end the war, instead of stronger weapons or more powerful magic. Rather than dominance and victory, the stories demonstrate what Gadamer describes as a willingness to allow the Other to “really say something to us.” As models to young adults for how to relate to those who our society paints as so evil as to be worthy of obliteration, these novels offer reasons for hope that a hermeneutics of the Other might be possible.

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In this chapter, I examine these three series with a specific focus on the means by which the protagonists find their way to peace, forgiveness, and healing in their societies and worlds. In the pages of their novels, they offer models for young people concerning methods for achieving peace both at home and abroad. I focus on how the Other is transformed from being seen as evil to becoming a partner in a dialogue. As these authors demonstrate, peace requires effort and an openness to alternatives to military might when approaching those their society has defined as evil.

**Trusting Peace—Overcoming Suspicion and Fear in Order to Build a New Society**

Amelia Atwater-Rhodes’s Kiesha’ra Series begins with *Hawksong*, published in 2003. In this novel, the narrator, Danica Shardae, is the heir to the throne of the avians, a civilization of shape-shifters with dual bird and human forms. In the novel’s opening, Danica visits a battlefield to retrieve her brother’s corpse. Her younger brother, like her father and sister before him, has died in the most recent bloody battle of an ancient war with the serpiente, shape-shifters who are both snake and human. The war between these two fundamentally different civilizations has gone on for millennia. Danica explains:

> Before a child of my kind learns to fly, she learns to hate. She learns of war. She learns of the race that calls itself the serpiente…. What she never learns is how the fighting began. No, that has been forgotten. Instead she learns that they murdered her family and her loved ones. She learns that these enemies are evil, that their ways are not hers and that they would kill her if they could.  

In July 2003 when the novel was published, such an opening would have resonated deeply in the minds of American youth who, in their daily lives, heard presidential

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18 Ibid., 1-2.
rhetoric and press coverage of American military campaigns abroad that pitted the United States against an enemy so fundamentally different in outlook from itself as to provoke the president to call the effort a “crusade.” President Bush’s statements in the months and years after 9/11 followed upon decades in which Islam had been depicted in the mainstream media as radically anti-American, bloodthirsty and evil. The seemingly perpetual Arab-Israeli conflict of previous decades, and events such as the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis, the 1990 Gulf War, and the 1998 Bin Laden Fatwa that called on Muslims worldwide to attack Americans, all influenced American’s sinister image of Islam and its leaders. Atwater-Rhode’s characterization reflected two societies irreconcilably different.

On Atwater-Rhodes’s battlefield, while searching for her brother’s body, Danica comes upon a young serpiente prince who has been mortally wounded by her brother. Overcome with grief, she kneels beside the wounded, but still living, serpiente and cannot bring herself to deliver the coup de grâce. She explains:

I loved my brother but I could not murder his killer. I could not look into the eyes of a boy terrified of death and shaking from pain, and feel hatred. This was a life: serpiente, yes, but still a life; who was I to steal it…

I found myself crying for this hated stranger and the endless slaughter that I had almost contributed to.\(^{19}\)

Here, Atwater-Rhodes takes American fantasy literature into new territory.

In this first act of trust and compassion, Danica overcomes the common avian belief that merely looking into the eyes of a serpiente prince will cause instant death. Danica’s pain at the loss of her own brother moves her to experience tragedy over a young boy’s death rather than hate for a reviled enemy. In that moment of reaching

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 7.
outside herself, she crosses an invisible line. She no longer sees only the enemy she is conditioned to hate. Now she sees a living, suffering individual, and that makes all the difference.

In *Hawksong*, the reader also meets the leader of the serpiente people, Zane Cobriana. After the death of his brother, he too is changed. In an overt act of trust, he puts himself and his kingdom into a position of vulnerability. He sends his sister, unarmed and alone, into the avian court. There she pleads for a ceasefire and invites the avians to a summit in the territory of a neutral third party, the king and queen of the tiger shape-shifters, the Mistari Dio and Disa. The meeting begins with the two young leaders of the serpiente and avians barely hiding their disdain for each other. The Mistari Disa opens the negotiation by admitting that peace will be difficult. But, she says, “so long as both [Danica and Zane] are willing to make an effort, there is always a chance for peace.”

Danica and Zane, reflecting their peoples’ fear and suspicion of the other’s intentions, resist the suggestion that peace is possible. When the Mistari Dio questions them about “‘how much [they are] willing to give’” for peace, they respond in turn: “[Danica] answered, ‘Anything.’ A breath later, Zane echoed [her response] with, ‘Everything.’”

Atwater-Rhodes depicts two young leaders who are desperate for peace.

The Mistari Disa suggests that Danica and Zane marry: “‘Tie the two royal families,’” she suggests. “‘Make the two sides into one. If you are willing to trust each other, and willing to put aside your anger and your hatred,’” she tells them, then their

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20 Ibid., 39.
21 Ibid., 41.
22 Ibid., 42.
kings will follow. They must figure out a way to trust each other in the most intimate way possible.

Although the idea appears “absurd”\(^{23}\) to many in the meeting, because of the “intense bloodshed and hatred [the] two kinds had known,”\(^{24}\) Danica finds herself contemplating the Disa’s suggestion. She finds evidence for hope in the miracle that the two warring nations have come together to talk.

When Zane sneaks into Danica’s quarters that night, Danica remains open. Zane explains why he is willing to consider the suggestion of a union, despite his initial reaction that it would be absurd. He explains that when he heard that “‘the pristine Danica Shardae had knelt in the blood and filth of the battlefield and held [his] brother’s hand and sung to him so he would not die alone,’” Zane began to have faith in the possibility that Danica “‘might have a heart after all.’”\(^{25}\) In these words, he takes the first tentative step toward his enemy and recognizes her as a feeling human being, despite the extreme differences in their natures.

So begins a careful weaving together of the two kingdoms as Danica and Zane reluctantly agree to believe that they both have the same goal: peace. As they join their royal houses, slowly, hesitantly, growing to trust and even to love one another, their communities reluctantly begin do so, as well. Their people find new ways to engage with each other, first through trading in the market place and then even through friendship. By

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 44.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 48.
the end of *Snakecharm,* the second book of the series, Danica is pregnant with the couple’s first child. Fantastical elements—impossible creatures such as shape-shifters—allows Atwater-Rhodes to emphasizes the dramatic significance of a union between two societies so fundamentally different that a successful pairing between them surprises even the doctor charged with caring for the young queen. In discussing the pregnancy the doctor says, “Apparently [the two races are] both human enough to breed together.” Underlying this comment is the cultural assumption that the other race is not human. In an environment in which the American president referred to the United States’ enemies as “barbaric” and evil, the suggestion that an enemy is not human parallel efforts in the American media to paint Islam as alien by focusing on its religious practices, its attitudes about women, suicide bombers, and its decapitation of criminals. Atwater-Rhodes’s imagery matches the rhetoric of the time that the United States was facing an enemy that was a “‘blood-thirsty,’” “‘force of darkness’” focused on destroying the free world. Against such an enemy, commentators and U.S. officials recommended “‘unleash[ing] the dogs of war.”

Evil in Atwater-Rhodes’s novels is defined as an Other who massacred loved ones in the name of revenge and perpetuated a blood feud—the cause of which no one

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27 Ibid., 31.
30 Ibid. Here Kellner quotes U.S. Army Colonel David Hunt during an interview with media commentator Bill O’Reilly.
remembers anymore. Despite these atrocities, Atwater-Rhodes’s protagonists reach across the chasm dividing the two peoples and find a way to achieve peace. In joining the two royal families in a marriage, the author offers a model of enemies approaching one another with openness. It is only through such openness, Atwater-Rhodes suggests, that a future of peace is possible. While a union such as the one the Mistari Disa suggests is obviously impossible between modern warring nations, the willingness of leaders to see one another’s claims as equal requires a shift in thinking that applies Gadamer’s concept of the fusing of horizons.\(^{31}\)

Through the five volumes of her series, Atwater-Rhodes shows characters working through a process of foregrounding their own prejudices, their “foreknowledge,” as Gadamer explains, to reach beyond their own experience and allow the Other “to present itself in all its otherness and…assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meaning.”\(^{32}\) As Zane and Danica commit to ending the millennia-long war their societies have fought, they become aware of their previously limited vision and examine their own “prejudices” to understand one another. They approach each other with openness, trusting that each of them has something to offer the other that will help them see beyond their own limited horizon. In this way, Atwater-Rhodes’s books demonstrate for young readers what a fusing of horizons, as Gadamer’s hermeneutics understands it, might look like.

Danica’s step toward comforting the dying Gregory Cobriana with a song demonstrates a shift in her perspective concerning the enemy. Her battlefield song is not


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 271-72.
about mercy, which implies power and a setting aside of justice, or empathy, or even sympathy, which suggests a distance from or pity for someone else’s suffering. In holding Gregory Cobriana’s hand as he lay dying, Danica shows the young serpiente that she shares his pain. She shows that she shares the sorrow his people will experience over his death. She does not put herself before or above her enemy. She demonstrates that she sees his claim to life as equal to her own. She rises above her and Gregory’s “own particularity” and achieves a higher universality of vision.\(^{33}\)

In the 21st century America’s multicultural environment, Danica’s actions represent a move from tolerance—accepting that others have a place in the culture—to inclusion, which requires embracing and celebrating the Other. This signifies a change beyond solely recognizing the Other’s right to equality. Such a move acknowledges the Kantian notion that each individual’s life must be seen as an end in itself. Her actions also exhibit compliance with Aristotle’s injunction “[t]o do the [right thing] to the right person, to the right extreme, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way…”\(^{34}\) Danica’s extension of herself to her enemy makes possible the peace that the later volumes construct. Instead of drawing the battle lines between good and evil, Atwater-Rhodes shows the reader that, despite the fact that both sides of a conflict have reasons to see each other as evil and worthy of death, both sides must see each other as good and worthy of life.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 32.

As the novels unfold, Atwater-Rhodes allows the reader to witness the depth of the mistrust and hatred Danica and Zane must overcome in order to successfully end the war and join their two royal families. The reader experiences for him or herself the personal vulnerability and trust required. As the Mistari Disa said, “peace will be difficult.”\(^\text{35}\) However, as Gadamer requires, for there to be understanding, each side must “accept some things that are against [it], even though no one else forces [it] to do so....[[Each side] must acknowledge that the Thou has something to say to [it].”\(^\text{36}\)

Danica is all too familiar with avian “fore-knowledge” of the serpiente. She herself refers to Irene Cobriana as a “creature”\(^\text{37}\) despite her human aspect. Her guard voices the common avian opinion that serpiente “do not know the meaning of peace —or honor;”\(^\text{38}\) and: “One can hardly call serpiente people.”\(^\text{39}\) Atwater-Rhodes’s novels reflect a depth of distrust and hatred found in American officials’ rhetoric concerning the enemy.

For his part, Zane accepts the common perception that avians’ are cold and distant. Calling Danica a “‘shell’”\(^\text{40}\) of a woman, he must set aside his own “fore-knowledge “of the avians and makes himself vulnerable enough to go to her, even though she is surrounded by those who would kill him on sight. He does so, hoping to find something that allows him, as Gadamer explains, “to experience the Thou truly as a Thou


\(^{37}\) Ibid., 25.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 63.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 139.
—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let [Danica] really say something to [him].”

In Zane’s openness, he “recognizes that [he] must accept some things that are against [him], even though no one else forces [him] to do so.”

As Danica and Zane negotiate the possibility of living together and joining their nations, they both must embrace one another rather than merely tolerating their differences to achieve their mutually essential goal. They must seek to rise “to a higher universality that overcomes not only [their] own particularity but also that of the other…[through which they are able to] see…better within the larger whole.” In doing so they join together for peace.

Despite their growing love for one another, the perception persists that the two peoples are too alien and too different to form one nation, even after their daughter’s birth and the creation of the joint court at Wyvern Hall. Many find the differences so profound that they see the marriage as unnatural, bringing the tenuous union under attack from forces determined to undermine it.

In the charged international environment of the early 21st century, such mistrust and rejection of the Other is a familiar and common experience. Counterterrorist rhetoric in the popular press and by the Bush and Obama administrations framed American enemies as incompatible with American values. In a charged environment crowded with stories of atrocities committed by ISIS and Boko Haram, terrorism became associated with radical Islam despite presidential efforts to deny the connection. Terms used by both

\[\text{41 Gadamer, } \textit{Truth and Method, } 355.\]

\[\text{42 Ibid.}\]

\[\text{43 Ibid., } 304.\]
President Bush and President Obama, and the world press such as “barbaric”44 and “savage,”45 infuse the discourse with the perception that our enemies, and by association, Islam is in conflict with democracy, freedom, civil liberties, and civilization itself.46 The realities and rhetoric of the world inhabited by her readers echo through Atwater-Rhodes’s series as Danica and Zane, and later Oliza and her cousin Hai, attempt to build peace despite the prejudices and distrust between the two people. The novels model a path by which American society might approach its enemies, as one that has “something to say” to it.

In forging the peace between the serpiente and the avian people, Atwater-Rhodes’s novels offer no easy route to the peace of which Danica and Zane dream; but, in her impossible world, she offers something more important: hope. As characters struggle with both their animal natures and their magical powers, all of which threaten to rend the society of Wyvern Court, young people cling to the belief that change is possible. The first generation to grow up without war covets and protects their peace, challenging those who would sabotage it through outright attack or clandestine subversion.

Zane and Danica’s daughter, Oliza, voices a hope for peace about which both Americans and a generation of avians and serpientes dream. When she learns that she


must abdicate the throne, she pleads with her people to strive for more than mere co-existence and to see the danger of clinging to old prejudices. She says:

…Every day in the market reveals the segregation and the prejudice that we have almost come to take for granted. We say, ‘That’s their way, not ours,’ and we walk away ignorant. Or worse, we say ‘Well, at least we aren’t at war,’ when we are killing each other with fear and hatred. We ignore the slander because at least it isn’t blades. We ignore the pain because, thank the sky, it isn’t blood.

…In my parents time, the mission was to stop the bloodshed, but in mine, my goal has always been to stop the hatred.\textsuperscript{47}

For the sake of the future, Oliza begs the two societies to risk seeing each other as worthy of respect, rather than continuing on in ignorance and fear. She exhorts her subjects to find a way to live “‘without hatred…” To “trust….Just \textit{try}…”\textsuperscript{48} because the “future is all [they] have. Atwater-Rhodes, through Oliza, challenges Americans to cross horizons and “transpose ourselves…and become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person.”\textsuperscript{49}

In Atwater-Rhodes’s series, the reader witnesses one societies’ efforts to find peace by daring to see the Other as valuable in his or her own right. Her lenses apply equally well to issues of racial and economic disparity in American society as violence against African Americans and discrimination against immigrants, and gays and lesbians rises to the attention of contemporary American consciousness. As a model to address conflicts, the Kiesha’ra series offers a model of how one foregrounds one’s prejudices and fuses horizons with the Other. Atwater-Rhodes changes the conversation from

\textsuperscript{47} Atwater-Rhodes, \textit{Wolfcry}, 190.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 192.

\textsuperscript{49} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 304.
defeating the evil Other, to one in which both sides seek a means to understanding one another and being open to embracing, even celebrating differences.

Finding Hope in the Arms of the Other – Love Breaks Down All Barriers

Laini Taylor’s Daughter of Smoke and Bone trilogy50 carries the reader into the hearts of two combatants on opposite sides of an endless war as they seek ways to achieve an impossible union. Taylor demonstrates how seeing the Other as an individual, allows people to move toward peace, and changes the perceptions of those around them, as well. In her Romeo and Juliette-style story of forbidden love, Karou, a chimaera, and Akiva, a seraph, dare, against all logic and hope, to fall in love. Taylor’s tale demonstrates how war between two irreconcilable civilizations affects both a community and the individual.

As in Atwater-Rhodes’s Kiesha’ra series, Taylor drops the reader into a thousand year-old conflict between the races of chimaera and seraphim. Individuals in these two communities, like a generation of Americans born since 2001, have grown up knowing nothing other than war.

Taylor’s human/chimaera protagonist, Karou lives with Brimstone, Issa, Twiga, and Yasri, all of whom represent different kinds of chimaera—a grab-bag title for a race, who, like the chimaera of myth, combine various physical traits of animals with that of humans. Karou draws them in her art-school sketchbook and to her friends in the human world of Prague, where she lives, they appear monstrous. “That’s what humans would

call them,” the narrator explains, “monsters. Demons, maybe, or devils.” The seraphim, on the other hand, have the mythical appearance of angels, complete with fiery wings and beautiful, perfect bodies. The chimaera and seraphim have fought their ancient war in an alternate universe that Karou knows nothing about, but is connected to the twenty-first century world we know through hidden portals.

Karou, for all appearances, is completely human. Her most notable physical characteristics are blue hair and open-eye tattoos on her palms that turn her hands into hamsas. She has lived in the human world all her life, with Brimstone, a towering ram-headed, dragon-clawed, scar-covered father-figure, and a naga mother-figure named Issa, who has “the face of an angel.” In these simple descriptions of chimaera, Taylor upends the classic image of monsters, portraying them as Karou’s loving, affectionate, and purposeful family unit.

Karou, however, leads a double life. When not in art class or behaving like a teenager with her friend, Zuzana, Karou runs errands for Brimstone. Unbeknownst to her, Brimstone is the chimaera Resurrectionist. He contributes to the endless war effort in his home world of Eretz by creating new bodies for the gleaned souls of soldiers who have fallen in battle. The process requires a pain tithe and a carefully assembled string of teeth. Karou’s errands involve traveling around the world through secret portals to an underworld of teeth merchants who Brimstone pays with wishes. Brimstone, also unbeknownst to Karou, has resurrected her after her execution in Eretz for the crime of falling in love with a seraph.

51 Laini Taylor, Daughter of Smoke and Bone, 39.
52 Ibid., 8.
After one such errand in search of teeth for Brimstone, Karou returns home to find a handprint scorched into the door of Brimstone’s workshop in Prague and Karou’s life changes forever. A seraph named Akiva burned handprints on all the doorways around the earth that, as the narrator explains, are “bitter with the devil’s magic.”

Akiva, too, comes from Eretz, and is a member of an elite corps of warriors called the Misbegotten who are bred in the harem of Eretz’ emperor, Jorem. These children are taken from their mothers at the age of five to train as front-line soldiers in the battle against the chimaera. Akiva, the angel, is “beautiful—truly, breathstealingly beautiful, in a way one rarely beholds in real life.” Those who encounter him while he travels the world searing his handprint into portals, however, notice that there was something wrong with his eyes. Taylor writes that they “were pure and luminous, mesmerizing and achingly beautiful, but something was…missing. Humanity, perhaps, that quality of benevolence that humans have, without irony, named after themselves.” This is the reader’s first clue that Akiva, and Taylor’s seraphim, are not the angels of Judeo-Christian scripture.

With these descriptions of Akiva’s childhood and Karou’s life with Brimstone and Issa, Taylor reverses the conventional associations with monsters and angels, causing the reader to question the cultural assumptions about the images of good and evil we expect in a fantasy novel. Taylor requires the reader to suspend judgment about who in the story is good and who is evil, engaging the reader in the process of constructing the

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53 Ibid., 59.
54 Ibid., 58.
55 Ibid., 58-59.
novel from these new associations. She forces the reader to accept the terms of the argument that the text will make: that monsters are good and angels are evil. Because the reader must take his or her cues about good and evil from her text, Taylor controls the reader’s emotional response to the remainder of the text. Like the interlocutors of Socrates’s dialogues, the reader must accept the author’s terms before the dialogue, or in this case the story, can proceed. Furthermore, Taylor not only requires that we accept the impossible, the existence of angels and chimaera, but also her construction of them. By undermining the stereotypes of angels and demons, Taylor deconstructs her readers’ assumptions and creates new expectations in their place. If seraphim cause “breathless, paralyzed panic,” in all who see them, and monsters are gentle, patient, and loving, the reader must depend on the author to provide the ground on which to base a notion of good and evil in the story. Furthermore, in one masterful stroke, Taylor empowers her readers to fore-ground their prejudices and expand their horizons so that a new response can be elicited.

The power of Taylor’s novels lies in her use of the forbidden love story to tell a tale of passion, despair, and the triumph of hope as these two pawns in a war far older than either of them overcome the revulsion and hate for the Other that, as enemies, they have experienced their whole lives. When Akiva first sees Karou in Morocco, neither of them knows anything of her chimaera past. He is “compelled…to follow her… as if a whisper beckoned him onward.” But when they finally come face to face with each other, their true relationship as enemies instantly reveals itself.

56 Ibid., 59.
57 Ibid. 78.
Karou stares into Akiva’s “kohl-rimmed eyes in a sun-bronzed face,” and, Taylor writes, her “pulse beat in the palms of her hands …Enemy. Enemy. Enemy. The knowledge pounded through her on the rhythm of her heartbeat: the fire-eyed stranger was the enemy.” In proximity to a seraph, Karou’s hamsas react with angel-killing power.

Soon after, Akiva burns all the portals he marked and Karou’s life changes forever. Taylor’s close-in, third-person point of view told from both Akiva’s and Karou’s alternating perspectives gives the reader enough insight into the emotional core of the two primary characters to make the reader long to see these two sorrowful young people get together. Taylor builds the reader’s understanding of the implications for, and the unlikelihood of, their impossible love. Like other stories based on the forbidden-love motif, the lovers’ societies’ prohibition against their union highlights the tragedy and illogic of hatred and the violent waste of young peoples’ lives that is war. The love Taylor builds between Akiva and Karou, using the images of impossible creatures, dramatically portrays what is possible when two beings look beyond the cultural construction of the Other as evil and instead see the individual heart residing there.

As in the Kiesha’ra series, in the face of immanent death, the characters bring previously accepted ideas about the enemy, their prejudices, preconceptions and hatred into the foreground of their consciousness and re-evaluate the individual who is suffering directly in front of them and dismiss the old ideas as inessential to understanding one another. This shift in both perspectives makes a love affair between the chimaera

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58 Ibid., 93-94.
Madrigal, Karou’s pre-resurrection identity, and the seraph Akiva plausible. Following a battle Akiva lies dying and in pain. Madrigal approaches and Taylor writes:

…For a long moment they just looked at each other. She cocked her head to one side, a quizzical, bird-like gesture that spoke not of savagery, but curiosity. Unaccountably, she was beautiful…He found himself transfixed by the compassion in her gaze. It made him think that maybe he had never really looked at a chimaera before.⁵⁹

Akiva rises above the boundaries of the impossible horizon that hides his society from that of Madrigal’s and paints all chimaera as the evil Other. This new perspective strips Akiva of fear and hatred of his enemy. It also strips the meaning from his death in a war he now realizes is also meaningless. At the moment they encounter one another for the first time, Madrigal “looked like a girl, a girl who had found a young man dying on the beach.”⁶⁰ For the few moments they are together that’s what he is: “Not a soldier, not anyone’s enemy, and the death that was upon him seemed meaningless.”⁶¹ In the fog of his approaching death, Akiva is able to see beyond his fear and contempt and rise above the limited horizon it provides to view Madrigal, the evil Other with clarity. Miraculously, instead of delivering the deadly coup de grâce Akiva expects, Madrigal applies a tourniquet to his nearly fatal wound. She then exhorts him to live.⁶²

When next Akiva and Madrigal meet, they dare to cross previously insurmountable boundaries, and they fall in love. For a month they meet secretly as lovers and begin to dream of a different kind of life, one in which there is no time for

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⁵⁹ Ibid., 269.
⁶⁰ Ibid., 270
⁶¹ Ibid
⁶² Ibid., 272.
war, that “terrible wasteful thing that no world ever needs.”⁶³ They find a way to see past the horrific crimes each one has committed in the war. As Madrigal kisses Akiva’s knuckles, where tattoos record a cruel tally of all the chimaera he has killed, she finds a way to look beyond what he has done, saying: “‘War is all we’ve been taught, but there are other ways to live. We can find them, Akiva. We can invent them. This is the beginning, here.’ She touched his chest and felt a rush of love for the heart that moved his blood…”⁶⁴ In these few stolen moments together Taylor allows readers to witness for themselves, through the intimacy of young lovers, the discovery that the hated Other is worthy of love. These two young people move beyond the need for atonement for crimes each society has inflicted on the other. Instead, Akiva and Karou achieve a form of forgiveness that moves them toward one another, to a “specific bond of belonging,”⁶⁵ of standing beside one another in understanding. In their love-soaked time together, they dream of remaking the world in which enemies build something together as equals.

It is hope that suffuses Taylor’s story about war and love and keeps the reader struggling alongside her two star-crossed lovers. It is hope that Taylor models as the modern answer to endless war and hatred. She wants readers to imagine something different when only tragedy, despair, more bloodshed, and an unknown future are all that seem possible. It is hope that there will be life for them, somehow, that imbues their love with urgency. It is hope that rises from Gadamer’s call to be open to expanding one’s horizons beyond a culture’s “conditionedness” and find a different response to the Other.

⁶³ Ibid., 381.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 388.

⁶⁵ Gadamer, Truth and Method, 320.
When a jealous half-sister betrays Madrigal and leads the warlord Thiago directly to the lovers’ sanctuary, Akiva is captured and tortured. In her prison cell awaiting execution, Madrigal explains to Brimstone the nature of her crime. She and Akiva fell in love, she tells him, and dared to dream of peace and a world “\emph{remade.}”\footnote{Taylor, \textit{Daughter of Smoke and Bone}, 402.} Brimstone’s final touching conversation with Madrigal in prison gives the lie to the seraph’s characterization of the chimaera as bloodthirsty monsters.

Brimstone confesses that the only way he has been able to continue “\textit{cycling souls through death after death,}”\footnote{Ibid., 405.} is by believing that he is keeping the chimaera people “\textit{alive . . .until the world can be remade.}”\footnote{Ibid.} With his words echoing Madrigal’s hope, Brimstone affirms his own dreams of peace, saying, “\textit{I believe it, too, child.}”\footnote{Ibid.} Despite her coming execution, he encourages her to believe in something bigger, something more than death and endless war, saying, “\textit{The only hope is. . .hope.}”\footnote{Ibid., 407.}

Taylor, through Brimstone, offers the reader a reason for hope. Beneath the sorrow that the reader experiences as “\textit{the blade glint[s] its descent}”\footnote{Ibid., 393.} and severs Madrigal’s head, lies the certainty that Akiva will find her again as Karou. Brimstone, in his own paean to hope, gives Madrigal a new name when he illegally resurrects her as a human baby—“karou” is the word for hope in the language of the chimaera. Taylor

\footnote{Taylor, \textit{Daughter of Smoke and Bone}, 402.} \footnote{Ibid., 405.} \footnote{Ibid.} \footnote{Ibid.} \footnote{Ibid.} \footnote{Ibid., 407.} \footnote{Ibid., 393.}
asserts that love and hope are the only possible response to the senseless death and
destruction that is war and steeps the entire series with hope: in Karou’s name, in
Brimstone’s assertion that hope is the real magic behind wishes,\textsuperscript{72} in the promise Akiva
makes to himself that he will make Karou happy again even if it means leaving her
forever.

Akiva’s stubborn refusal to give up his dream of peace and the hope that Karou
might love him as she did when she was Madrigal, carries the story through its tragic
turns. It is his hope that the war might end that converts Akiva’s two siblings from brutal
warriors to compassionate conspirators in Akiva’s plan to overthrow the Emperor and
end the carnage. Taylor suggests that if these two battle-hardened soldiers can change,
then anything is possible. If Akiva’s hope is strong enough to stop them from hunting,
killing, and enslaving innocent chimaera refugees, then his dream of a world remade
must triumph. Soon, more seraphim disobey the emperor’s orders to kill all remaining
chimaera who flee the seraphim’s attacks. Soon, Karou also finds a way to stop a few
straggling chimaera rebels who have carried on the battle against all odds.

Through their unflagging hope, Akiva and Karou eventually bring about the end
of the war as they dreamt of doing in the Temple in Eretz. Brimstone’s words, “The only
hope is …hope,” echo Gadamer’s, who points out in \textit{Truth and Method} that, “Ever since
the Prometheus of Aeschylus, hope has been…a clear mark of human experience” and
of great importance to human history.\textsuperscript{73} Through Akiva, Taylor demonstrates that hope

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 403.

\textsuperscript{73} Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method}, 344.
offers a reason to live and to love, even when all seems lost. She writes:

No matter how much [Akiva] tried not to hold out hope, hope surfaced, persistent. He had no more control over it than he did over the drone of the wind. But was it the reason he was doing any of this? For the chance of a reward? No. If he knew absolutely that Karou would never forgive him and never love him again, he would still do anything in his power…to rebuild the world for her….

But…he didn’t know absolutely that there was no hope. Not yet. 74

For readers of her series, who face their own future of seemingly endless war, Taylor route out of despair is hope. She suggests that by searching for a way to cross beyond one’s own limited horizon and truly see the Other, to recognize the love and beauty in each life, and to see the Other as worthy of love and understanding, one can find a path into the future, despite the messages of hate and loathing. For 21st century young adults, Taylor offers a path to seeing the enemy as something other than monstrous. Truly seeing an individual lets us find a way toward love which opens a path to the future, away from war, racism, and violence toward peace, compassion, and understanding.

In Christopher Paolini’s blockbuster Inheritance series, which I turn to below, this desire for mutual understanding between oneself and the Other ends the war and brings peace. But, as Paolini suggests, before one can understand the Other, one must first understand oneself.

**Understanding the Other: The Education of a Hero and his Nemesis in Christopher Paolini’s Inheritance Cycle.**

In the four volumes of Christopher Paolini’s best selling series, Inheritance Cycle, the reader follows the transformation of Eragon, a farm boy from a small hamlet

in the fictional kingdom of Alagaësia, into a hero. In his quest to defeat the evil king Galbatorix, he travels the length and breadth of his world. During his final confrontation with the king, however, it is not superior military strength or more knowledge of magic that finally defeats his foe. Instead, Eragon’s desire to make Galbatorix understand the pain and suffering of others that finally defeat the king. Along the way, Eragon, the eponymous hero of the first book of the series, must first learn who he is, the nature of love and friendship, and the strength of loyalty and honor. Only by being sure of these things himself can he confront his nemesis and bring peace to Alagaësia.

In the first volume of the Inheritance Cycle, published in 2003, Eragon discovers a rare dragon’s egg in the treacherous mountains near his home. When reptile-like beings called Ra’zac come in search of the egg, Eragon flees, taking with him the young dragon Saphira, who has hatched and imprinted on him. Afraid for both of their lives, they leave their friends and family to face the Ra’zac without them. Unable to find Eragon or the precious egg, the Ra’zac murder Eragon’s uncle and adopted father, Garrow. Eragon’s flight from his home leads him to the army of the Varden, rebels seeking to overthrow Galbatorix. They represent the combined forces of rebel humans, dwarves, elves, and the warlike Urgals. The Varden are the kingdom’s only hope for liberation from Galbatorix’s evil reign.

Galbatorix’s crimes against his kingdom are horrific. He uses torture and enslavement to force allegiance to him. Speaking of Galbatorix’s past is a crime.

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punishable by death.\textsuperscript{76} Galbatorix is a gifted sorcerer whose powerful spells ward him from injury and attack. His immense power allows him to control other people’s minds. However, Gabatorix’s most hideous crime is the creation of an army of warriors who, although they are living human beings, have been ensorcelled so that they feel no pain. Only decapitation or a blow to the head stops these single-minded fighting men, called the Laughing Dead. They fight ruthlessly without fear of injury, capture, or death and laugh as they do battle and kill their enemy.\textsuperscript{77}

Throughout the series, Eragon learns how to probe the consciousness of others and in doing so, he gains new understanding of himself and the value of all life. Early in the series, Eragon receives a prophecy that tells him, “‘When all seems lost and your power is insufficient, go to the rock of Kuthian and speak your name to open the Vault of Souls.’”\textsuperscript{78} The process of discovering his true name requires that both Eragon and Saphira undergo a search for self-knowledge that, like Gadamer’s need for foreknowing, involves opening oneself to unpleasant truths about who one is. Not only must Eragon release modesty and recognize his strengths, but he also must overcome arrogance and pride to embrace his weaknesses and claim them as part himself. When he finally discovers his name, he is able to say:

\begin{quote}
The name, his true name, was weaker and more flawed than he would have liked, and he hated himself for that, but there was also much to admire within it, and the more he thought about it, the more he was able to accept the true
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{76} Paolini, \textit{Eragon}, 34.
\textsuperscript{77} Paolini, \textit{Brisinger}, 429-431.
\textsuperscript{78} Paolini, \textit{Eragon}, 206.
nature of his self. He was not the best person in the world, but neither was he the worst.  

In this important step, naming oneself, Eragon foregrounds his own strengths and shortcomings and truly understands who he is. Only then is he able to truly face Gabatorix. It is only in his own humility with his newly acquired self-knowledge, that he recognizes that he is not perfect, or the most powerful, or all he had hoped he would be, but that he is simply himself. This knowledge enables him to see Galbatorix as equally vulnerable and flawed, but also an individual worthy of love.

In his newly-achieved humility, Eragon learns the worth of every living creature. One of the oldest dragons he encounters in the Vault of Souls shares with Eragon a vision of sleeping starlings. The dragon allows Eragon and Saphira a glimpse of the dreams of these humblest of creatures. The “flickering” dreams in the birds’ minds, “fast as the blink of an eye,” make Eragon pause, and he puzzles over what the dragon wants him to understand. In the final confrontation with Galbatorix, this lesson, that “even the smallest of the starlings’ concerns” are as important as “the worries of a king,” provides him a means to end Galbatorix’s evil reign.

Through all four volumes, Eragon acknowledges a growing awareness of life around him, from the rabbits he hunts to the grass he sleeps on and soldiers dying on the battlefields. He peers into the consciousnesses of those he encounters and perceives the preciousness of life. With his insight into the dreams of starlings, Eragon learns that each individual’s concerns and dreams, no matter how trivial or insignificant we think them to be, are of the greatest importance to the individual. Only arrogance, pride, and ignorance

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80 Ibid., 582.
keep us from recognizing this truth. Eragon’s ability to read the thoughts of even the tiniest of creatures acts as a metaphor for Gadamer’s concept of transposing oneself. By allowing Eragon to rise above his own “particularity” and recognize the Other’s “particularity,” he is able to connect to and validate the essential nature of the Other. When examining another’s mind, Eragon comes to inhabit that mind and experiences the individual’s memories, pains, sorrows, joys, fears, and loves. Doing so alters Eragon’s perceptions of himself and those whose minds he probes. By effectively removing the barrier that separates characters from one another, Paolini offers a powerful message concerning how we can allow the Other to say something to us.

When Eragon finally confronts Galbatorix in the climax of the series, Eragon staggers in the face of Galbatorix’s superior strength, not just in swordplay, but in his ability to penetrate Eragon’s mind. Galbatorix’s attack on his consciousness was “[a] blade of thought, honed to an infinitesimal point,” that pierced “Eragon’s consciousness and sheath[ed] itself in the marrow of his being. . . .[I]t tore at the fabric of his mind, seeking to destroy his will, his identity, his very awareness.” 81 Galbatorix invades Eragon’s mind, and Eragon’s newly-won identity is forced to retreat, “until all that was left to him was a small, bright nub overshadowed by the looming weight of Galbatorix’s presence.” 82 As the king demands that he “‘Submit,’” 83 Eragon mourns his failure to defeat the wicked king. In thinking of his own despair, Eragon gives preference to his own wants and needs, assuming his own perceptions to be more important, more true.

81 Ibid., 712.
82 Ibid., 713.
83 Ibid.
and more urgent than Galbatorix’s. Nevertheless, from the depths of all that he has learned over the past years of self-exploration—fear, pain, hard-won connections to others, and his knowledge of even the least of the creatures of the forest—Eragon understands the folly of all attempts to defeat Galbatorix through strength or magic alone. Instead, he constructs a spell without words that is “instinct and emotion.” 84 Through it, Eragon allows Galbatorix to “understand…. The spell was not an attack; it was an attempt to communicate…. [H]e wanted Galbatorix to comprehend fully and completely” 85 what the king’s life had meant to those around him. As the other allied spell casters in the room join their power to Eragon’s, the spell grows. It becomes a spell that “would also compel [Galbatorix] to experience all the feelings, both good and bad, that he had aroused in others since the day he had been born.” 86 As Galbatorix reels under the weight of this knowledge, Eragon, hears “the echo of thousands of voices: an unbearable cacophony of pains and joys innumerable, echoing forth from both the present and the past.” 87 At that moment, when Galbatorix is most distracted, Eragon’s friend, the elf Arya, kills the king’s dragon, Shruikan. In that instant—at the moment of the king’s most profound grief and weakness—Eragon pierces Galbatorix with his sword. Galbatorix begs Eragon to make the pain, physical and emotional, stop. But Eragon will not. In a final acknowledgement of horror at the torment he has caused and an inability to

84 Ibid., 714.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 714-15.
87 Ibid. 715.
bear any more of his own suffering, Galbatorix shouts, “Be not.” He disappears in a “flash of light brighter than the sun.”\textsuperscript{88} With his final spell, he ceases to exist.

In Paolini’s final resolution, the reader witnesses the oppressor’s transformation. Galbatorix’s true inner-self confronts the pain and agony he has caused and his own struggle with the loss of those he loved. It proves too heavy a burden alongside his grief as Shruikan dies. When he can tolerate it no longer, he chooses nothingness instead of more suffering. Galbatorix’s final decision to end his life reveals that he is not the cold, unfeeling monolithic evil that Alaglaësia has come to believe he is. The human part of Galbatorix—the part of him that feels empathy, remorse, sorrow, and joy—pushes him to choose self-immolation over the possibility of causing more pain, or experiencing the continued agony of loss. Galbatorix’s new understanding transforms the oppressor into a partner to his victims. He finally sees beyond his own limited horizon and understands the Other.

Like Galbatorix’s newly-crossed horizon, in the ongoing battle between the U.S. and its enemies both sides require a shifted perspective to understand that the violence perpetrated by all parties transforms oppressor and victim. Violence, torture, and war leave their mark on everyone involved. For Paolini, victory over evil requires not superior military power but a shift in understanding—the ability to fuse one’s horizon with the Other. Only when both sides see each other clearly and recognize the effect their actions have had on themselves, the Other, and the world can an end to war be possible and healing begin. Peace requires an openness to unpleasant truths about oneself (recognizing that there will be some things against us that we must accept), a humility

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 719.
concerning one’s place in the universe (achieving a higher universality of vision), and a willingness to see the Other as a worthy partner in the dialogue (acknowledging that the Thou has something to say to me).

**Conclusion**

The fantasies written since the fall of the Twin Towers in New York City provide a fascinating insight into just how wars affect both sides in any conflict. Without a concerted effort to see beyond the certainty of one’s own limited horizon, trust, hope, and understanding become causalities of the efforts to destroy one’s enemies.

The fantasy writers I examine in this chapter reflect a culture of fear, mistrust, and hatred in a world born out of September 11, 2001. Nevertheless, these writers for young adults explore the possibility of resolutions to conflict beyond that of mutual annihilation, even when enemies seem implacably determined to destroy each other. In Amelia Atwater-Rhodes’s Kiesha’ra series, warring factions, exhausted by millennia of war, discover their common humanity and end the conflict by becoming vulnerable to one another and trusting their future to the Other. In The Daughter of Smoke and Bone series, Laini Taylor’s two young protagonists find hope even when others are unable to see beyond their societies’ fear and loathing. Love unexpectedly, instantly, and profoundly changes them forever. Finally, Christopher Paolini’s Inheritance series demonstrates how insight into oneself and the suffering of the Other changes the individual from oppressor to partner in suffering. In each series, young protagonists approach the brutality of their conflict open-eyed. They witness the destruction that touches the entirety of their societies, innocent and combatant alike. They see clearly the suffering and hatred in
which they have participated. They do not condemn or seek retribution, or atonement. Instead, they recognize that each side of the conflict has valid needs, desires, and pain. Rather than continuing the endless cycle of violence and death, they seek something different. They seek an end to the hate.

These writers demonstrate that, in the 21st century, war can no longer be portrayed as a glorious enterprise between brave warriors or fearless heroes who willingly sacrifice their own safety in the face of evil in order to guarantee the survival of the human race. Contemporary fantasy novels show war and its impact in all of their gory detail. No corner of civilization is spared murder, rape, torture, or mutilation. All sides suffer graphically on the pages of the books 21st century young adults read. In these works of fantasy, the Other is not evil, the battle itself is. In the books I examine in this chapter, the heroes are certain of only one thing: the wars they have been fighting must end, one way or another. Vengeance and hatred finally feel futile.

In the hate-filled environment created by the counterterrorist rhetoric of the American national security state and the mistrust, suppression, and violence those considered to be Other suffer, American fantasy writers offer models of how to approach the Other and find a different path to the future. Only when both sides of a conflict see the Other as valued and necessary collaborators in a solution can they achieve peace. Instead of more war, more violence, and more death, new heroes seek trust, hope, and understanding.
CONCLUSIONS

The most powerful words in English are, “Tell me a story.”

~Pat Conroy, My Reading Life

In his 1996 Carnegie Medal acceptance speech, writer Phillip Pullman noted that “There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children’s book.” Underlying Pullman’s comment is an assumption that literature for children explores themes and topics of great importance to human culture and to the development of future generations’ understanding of the world. In short, children’s stories matter.

For the last eleven years I have worked as an independent school librarian and teacher. In that capacity I have explored children’s literature in all genres with young people. I have witnessed for myself the impact stories have on children and young adults of all ages. When a story engages a child’s imagination to offer a glimpse into a world outside the reader’s ken, or insights into people or places they have never imagined, the story’s impact on a young person’s life multiplies exponentially.

In this thesis I have explored novels read by young adults and written by American authors between 1950 and 2014 with a specific focus on fantasy. I focus on fantasy because critics and literary theorists agree that fantasy offers a particularly powerful lens through which to examine how a society understands itself. As Rosemary Jackson explains in Fantasy: Literature of Subversion, fantasy as a genre enables writers to “name otherness,” which, she says “is a telling index of a society’s religious and
political beliefs.”¹ Writers and thinkers as diverse as J. R. R. Tolkien, Michel Foucault, Northrop Frye, Lynette Hunter, and Rosemary Jackson recognize fantasy’s power to elucidate and comment on the consensus reality of the reader without drawing attention to what it is doing. In Tolkien’s words, by virtue of it being an expression of the imagination, fantasy is “Art.” Indeed, for Tolkien, fantasy is “the most nearly pure form [of Art], and so (when achieved) the most potent.”² When fantasy takes readers into what he calls the Perilous Realm, fantasy holds a mirror up to reality but reflects back “things as we are (or were) meant to see them.”³ Fantasy as a mirror reflects truth, both its beauty and terror.

Michel Foucault studied the fantastic literature of the Middle Ages and determined that a society’s fantasies reveal “the intimate corners of [a culture’s] psyche.”⁴ For Foucault, a work of literature exists as a node of meaning in a complex web of interconnected meanings; it is a statement in a discourse that arises out of a specific network of cultural, political, economic, and historical experiences that both express and

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³ Ibid., 75.

embody one another. Foucault’s discourse analysis allows us to see fantasy as an artifact which is “inseparable from the ethical-political actuality in which it finds itself.”

For Northrop Frye, by building an alternate reality out of the world in which the reader lives, fantasy requires the reader to keep one eye on the consensus reality and one eye on the fantasy realm. In doing so, the fantasy author and the reader together construct something new. Through a constant movement in and out, back and forth, between the narrative’s world and the reader’s world, fantasy texts encourages readers to dig deeper into what they are reading in search of meaning beyond the literal words, while also looking both outward to the world around them for a societal meaning, and inward to find personal meaning in the text.

Finally, because fantasy openly associates itself with the impossible, author and critic Lynnette Hunter, explains that fantasy, like a game, is “never imposed by physical or moral duty… never confused with real life….And because of this nonmoral, disinterested, isolated nature,” it aims not “for the ‘true’ but the ‘pure.’” By projecting an attitude of disinterested separateness, fantasy opens the reader to experiences that he or she might not previously have expected. In its depiction of the impossible, it transports the reader to a perspective in which the laws of the known world do not apply. In that

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8 Lynnette Hunter, Modern Allegory and Fantasy, 47. Here Hunter quotes Johan Huizinga’s Homo Ludens: Proeve Eener Bepaling Van Het Spel-Element Der Cultuur (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).
shift of “venue,” the writer calls into question the “arbitrary contingency of the universe we inhabit.” In doing so, it focuses the reader’s attention on the “essence of ethical legality” in a culture. In other words, a fantasy can focus on questions of who and what we are, who and what we accept as good, and what constitutes evil because it presents itself as a game. Using literary techniques that encourage the reader to “internalize” the problems of the fictional society or to empathize with characters in the story who are different than or outside the mainstream, fantasy is able to subtly manipulate and alter a reader’s reaction to the ideas that are not consonant with the dominant culture of the reader’s society.

Furthermore, because fantasy depicts “the different natures of good and evil, and [is] centrally concerned with viewing conduct in ethical terms,” Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz believe fantasy forces the reader to attend to the arbitrariness of many of our ethical constraints and opens up the possibility for new boundaries for ethical behavior, and new definitions of good and evil.

Rosemary Jackson sees fantasy as a valuable tool to subvert a society’s image of itself and expose realities that are subtly a part of the culture’s fabric but remain hidden from view. Because fantasy creates new meaning by combining the “real” and the “imaginary” it can hide a gloss on a society’s conditions without exposing itself to censorship or suspicion, making fantasy a powerful tool for commenting on a society’s

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10 Ibid.

values. Finally, because fantasy is “aesthetically, enticingly, and cleverly” packaged, young adults read it by the millions.

For all these reasons, an exploration of fantasy novels reveals American culture’s most sacrosanct and intimate ideas about who we are as a people, and who or what we see as a threat. In the pages of American fantasy novels, that threat comes to life as the evil Other. My review of American fantasy novels written for young readers published between 1950 and 2014 reveals that, in the pages of their works, American authors employ every available trope—demons, darkness, trolls, madmen, mayhem, and more—to transform America’s enemies and their crimes into recognizable evil to be battled by their heroes.

In exploring works of fantasy, I found not a change in how Americans define evil, but rather a change in how we as a society approach evil. In that change it is possible to discern a new understanding of who we are as a people and who we would like to be.

In the earlier works I analyzed, evil is portrayed as a force in the very fabric of the universe, acting to enslave humankind. In Poul Anderson’s work, *Three Hearts and Three Lions* (1953), evil is done at the behest of an ambiguous force called Chaos. Chaos seeks to enshroud the world in a perpetual “dusk” in which there can be no “‘bricht sunshine [or] green leaves [or] blossoms.” To Anderson, evil is “something old and wild and blind at war with man and the works of man.” Anderson’s hero battles the

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14 Ibid., 160.
forces of evil, the trolls, the giants, and wanton women, but Chaos remains a force outside of human control. This image accords well with American understanding of the battles they had recently fought in Europe and the Pacific, and the horrors of Auschwitz, Dachau, and Bataan. All people of decency and honor can do, as Anderson’s hero suggests, is continue the fight. Similarly, in Anderson’s second work of the era, *The Broken Sword* (1954), humans are mere pawns in the hands of gods, at whose purposes humans can only guess. Nevertheless, it is because of their lust and their desire for comfort or privilege that humans fall prey to evil’s manipulations. Anderson seems to suggest that human beings are not completely blameless for their actions. Both heroes and villains in his works act of their own volition, rushing headlong into battle with duty, revenge, or both, compelling them onward. For Anderson, human beings cannot escape their fate. They must defend the weak, rectify injustice and not shrink from using every weapon at hand in the battle. Anderson’s work rings of duty in a just cause, a notion matched by American perceptions of its role in the world following victory in World War II. In Anderson’s novels we find the dramatization of the world descending into two camps: one that stands for “Law,” peace, order, and liberty and one that stands for the opposite. This image mirrors the battle lines drawn by the Cold War. In American rhetoric of the era, the Soviet Union stood for tyranny, atheism, and slavery. As the bastion of democracy, Christian values, and freedom, the U.S. was all that stood against the advance of Chaos.

Published during the tumultuous 1960s, Andre Norton’s works belie a more complicated notion of evil and who the enemy is. In the first two volumes of her Witch World series, she furthers the idea that evil is a force in the universe and must be battled
with all available weapons, even at the cost of self-annihilation. Norton personifies evil as an invading race whose machines and technology are so alien to the people of Witch World that they represent something more ominous than mere tyranny or enslavement. Norton’s evil threatens the very existence of Estcarp itself. Norton contrasts the natural magic of the Witches, who use intuition, will, and faith to manipulate the Power, to the tubes, wires, engines and machines of the Kolder. When Simon and Jaelithe Tregarth turn the Kolder weapons back on Kolder, they watch in satisfaction and horror as the Kolder destroys itself. Here, Norton warns of a trust in weapons we cannot control, despite their efficacy and the extreme fear we harbor of the enemy. Norton’s last three volumes demonstrate a different threat to peace-loving people who only want to be left alone. Evil will never end as long as there are those who would use power and knowledge to manipulate and enslave others. The Tregarth triplets confront a befouled landscape in which the Power itself has been tainted because of human arrogance and lust for power. In these later works, the battle forces two of the triplets to question their own motives and moral makeup. In a similar way Americans’ reaction to revelations about the war in Vietnam instigated a national soul-searching about the horrors U.S. forces perpetrated in the name of defending liberty.

Other writers who published works during pivotal years of the 20th century, 1960 through 1980, conceive of evil as a product of the human soul, not a force manipulating it. In the novels of Lloyd Alexander, Ursula Le Guin, and Virginia Hamilton, evil results from human efforts to attain immortality or from greed and hubris. Human beings manipulate magic and all living things for their own personal pleasure. Or, as in Hamilton’s novels, evil emanates out of fear and ignorance. In Hamilton’s horrific
portrayal of the future, she paints a picture of a society that, out of ignorance and complacency, has destroyed the Earth. In the wasteland her characters encounter, they find the results of human errors so profound that not even a faith in science can right them. Hamilton’s insights into the means by which a society excludes and denigrates those who do not conform to a specific notion of normal speaks directly to the perception of evil as a byproduct of human fear and the misuse of power exerted against the Other.

Finally, Ursula Le Guin’s Earthsea novels represent an interesting change in the perception of evil in the works I consider. Published over the course of 33 years her notion that evil resides in the human soul did not change over that time. However, in her earlier novels she blames human hubris and ignorance as the cause of evil. Later in the series, she holds human consciousness itself responsible. She asserts that the root of all the despair, greed, and suffering we experience can be found in our separation from nature, in the rise of our consciousness from the abyss of unknowing to an awareness of the world and our place in it. For Le Guin, evil arises from our efforts to avoid facing the knowledge that ultimately our lives are just “a wisp of dust, a breath that [shines] an instant,” then disappears like motes in a fire. Only humans see evil in the natural cycle of life and death. For Le Guin, there can be no release from this fear of death except in loving and being loved.

Robert Jordan’s epic 14-volume series, published between 1990 and 2013, is significant, not because it represents a return to the concept of evil as a force in the universe working to enslave humanity, but in the means by which he and Brandon Sanderson offer for battling and containing evil. In the final confrontation with the Dark

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One, Jordan and Sanderson’s hero proves not that humans can resist evil if necessary, but that in each choice we make every day we either move the universe closer to serving evil’s ends, or closer to containing it. But more importantly, no one can stand alone in confronting evil. It is a battle we must join together to fight. By rejecting what Darkness offers—fear, hate, and an unquenchable thirst for power—individuals force evil’s retreat. In rejecting Darkness we find joy, community, and life. In the daily choices between light and darkness, Jordan and Sanderson suggest, we find the chance to live and love again, and again, and again.

The final three series I examine are noteworthy because of the way their heroes achieve victory and peace. In the works of Amelia Atwater-Rhodes and Laini Taylor, evil emanates from the conditions of war. Each side perpetrates horrors against one another. In the face of endless death, genocide, and suffering, Atwater-Rhodes and Taylor portray societies seeking alternative means to peace besides more destruction, bloodshed, and genocide. They offer hope, love, and trust as a means to shift perspective toward the Other as Hans-Georg Gadamer suggests. When enemies recognize that the Other, too, has a valid claim to existence, they are able to see that the Other’s way of being in the world has something to “say…to me.”\textsuperscript{16} Christopher Paolini’s work also suggests that it is not superior power or weaponry that will bring about peace, but understanding and human connection. In this way these writers model an alternative to more war and death, and instead suggest forgiveness, understanding, and hope as a means to approach one’s enemy.

In the end, no matter how the evil is portrayed, either as a force in the universe or a result of human hubris, at the center of all these novels lies the human soul. When humans think only of themselves, or desire immortality and power, evil is the result. The common thread running through both fantasy literature and the long history of western ethics is the question of how to live in a world ruled by competing interests, limited resources, and death. The authors I examined suggest that in approaching the Other, not just an alien group outside the community, but the other inside of us as well, we must seek ways to join together, rather than divide ourselves in endless conflict and suffering. In the fantasy novels I examine the most important means humans have for defeating evil is the very thing that makes us human, our ability to move outside ourselves and imagine a life that is not like ours, just as fantasy itself does. In doing so, we are able to extend love, compassion, understanding, and hope to the Other. As Martin Luther King, Jr. so eloquently said, “Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that.” In the pages of their fantasy novels, American authors offer models of how love does just that.
AFTERWARD

A Teacher’s Guide: Social Justice and Fantasy Literature

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.
~Nelson Mandela

As I prepare this manuscript for submission to Georgetown University as a final testament to the journey I have taken while earning the degree of Doctor of Liberal Studies, I am struck by the urgency surrounding the education of young people about living morally responsible and ethical lives. Recent headlines and social media posts confirm that evil is alive and well in our world today. It surfaces in YouTube videos documenting violence perpetrated against people of color. It screams from headlines from conflict zones and the inner city. Its influence manifests itself in the abuse of resources by business and power by political leaders. It orders a society that systematically denies agency, human dignity, justice, or a voice to those perceived to be Other.

For that reason, teaching students to ask questions concerning the messages about conflict in the literature they read becomes imperative. When young people dig deeper into the causes of war and suffering in fictional worlds, they are better able to understand conflict in their own. Furthermore, by examining the scenarios portrayed in fantasy literature that spur heroes to act for peace, they begin to understand how individual action and personal responsibility make change happen.

In “Reading Democracy: Exploring Ideas that Matter with Middle Grade and Young Adult Literature,” Steven Wolk, Assistant Professor of Teacher Education at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, argues that teachers can teach students about
topics as complex and nuanced as “moral and ethical consciousness… war, peace, and nonviolence…culture, racism, and prejudice.”¹ Using inquiry-based instruction, asking students to “question…investigate and explore,”² teachers interested in social justice pedagogy allow young people to engage with issues outside their classroom walls. By witnessing how fictional characters question the status quo, investigate the forces that shape their world, and by exploring alternative solutions to pressing problems, fiction spurs readers to action. Reading fantasy helps move the study of literature out of the language arts classroom. Digging into the conditions of a fantasy world under stress, infuses literature with meanings beyond the page and offers insight into students’ lives.

For teachers interested in using fantasy novels as a means of heightening awareness of differences and social justice, guiding questions about identity, perspective, and bias in the fantasy novels they read aid young readers to see beyond the demons and metaphors of darkness. When they begin to understand the intricate connection between perspective and language they begin to recognize the same connections in the world of their consensus reality. Questions that help them approach fantasy analytically offer new lenses for reading human nature. When they delve deeply into alternative ways of being in works of fantasy they are able to see differences in their own world differently. If the characters they read about find paths to action that end conflict and achieve peace, than the possibility of understanding among inherently different groups of people becomes possible.

¹ Steven Wolk, “Reading Democracy” Exploring Ideas That Matter with Middle Grade and Young Adult Literature,” English Journal 103, no. 2 (2013), accessed November 3, 2013, 47.

² Ibid., 48.
Below I sketch an approach for using fantasy literature in a classroom that explores questions about identity, perspective, and social justice. Once students have analyzed fantasy novels using these concepts, they will be well equipped to turn those same lenses on the events and conditions in their own lives.

**Objective: Teaching Social Justice Through Fantasy Novels: A Concept Based Approach**

As a genre, fantasy literature examines fundamental questions of right and wrong through the portrayal of good and evil in an impossible world. In doing so, fantasy literature provides an exemplary way of exposing and questioning the assumptions inherent in the values of the student’s consensus reality. By exploring how a writer presents the source of Otherness, how characters approach the Other, and resolve an imaginary conflict, a reader can gain insight into the assumptions of his or her own society about war, differences of perspective, and peace.

Social justice pedagogy requires that students think straightforwardly about identity, difference, inequity, and justice. Working back and forth between their own experience and the experience of characters in a fantasy text, students use these concepts to look critically at an alien or impossible world. By doing so students have a space that is distant enough from their own lives in which to practice new skills where they can honestly and openly evaluate the issues they encounter. Once they have examined an imaginary world, they will have gained some facility at naming similar conditions in their own world.

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Teachers should choose a work of fantasy in which two or more societies are engaged in a violent conflict or war. Any of the novels I examine in this thesis will serve that purpose. While students read the novel, teachers should introduce the concepts listed below and ask students to keep them in mind while they read. Students will examine how identity and conflict function in the novel’s society, and how authors use language and the elements of fantasy novels to influence readers’ views of the enemy and the conflict in the story. The following are intended to be guiding questions in discussions with students to help them better understand the conditions and perspectives they encounter in novels.

Concepts and Questions for Discussing Social Justice Issues in Fantasy Literature

Identity

“Teaching Tolerance” is a website created by The Southern Poverty Law Center and dedicated to supporting teachers interested in including social justice issues in their curriculum. According to their Anti-Bias Framework, identity is:

- The collective aspect of the set of characteristic by which a thing or person is definitively recognized or known.
- The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.\(^4\)

Identity reflects the way the world “knows” us externally, primarily based on how we look, act, or with whom we associate. Identity also has an internal component, however.

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How we characterize ourselves is equally as important,\textsuperscript{5} and essential to understanding Otherness. For young people, especially adolescents, in addition to characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, education, and socioeconomic status, characteristics of gender, sexual orientation, and culture also begin to emerge as central to identity.

Students will better understand how the text presents the Other if they understand their own position in their society. By exploring where they stand, either within or outside mainstream culture, they begin to recognize how behaviors, choices, and opportunities are shaped by society’s expectations and perceptions of them. By becoming aware of the messages mainstream culture conveys through language and imagery about who they are, they will better understand how similar messages work in the fantasy novel.

**Guiding Question concerning Identity**

- Privately explore: How do I fit into the perceived mainstream American culture with respect to race, language, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, education, religion, and socioeconomic status?

- What messages about my identity are reaffirmed or negated by messages in the media, books, and cultural expectations?

- How do I affirm or reject messages I receive from mainstream culture about who I am? What makes me unique?

- How do I think people perceive me? How closely do their perceptions conform to my self-perception?

- Concerning characters in the text: Are their characters in the text with whom I feel an affinity? How is my identity reflected in the text? Do any of the characters look or act like me? If so, which ones? If not, what characteristics do they have that I do not?

How do characters in the text respond to those who are like me? How do characters respond to those who are not like me?

Who is the protagonist or hero of the story? Who is the antagonist or villain?

Referring to the novel’s protagonist, how does he or she reflect the society’s norms? How do other characters in the novel reflect the society’s norms? How does he or she stand with respect to the society’s norms?

Referring to the novel’s antagonist, how does he or she reflect the society’s norms? How does he or she stand with respect to the society’s norms?

What problem does the society in the text face? Who/what is responsible for the problem? Who/what assumes the responsibility for correcting/righting/confronting the society’s problems?

How is the antagonist different than the protagonist? How are they the same?

**Perspective**

Inherent in any discussion of identity and conflict lies the concept of perspective or point of view. Perspective infuses a narrative with the values and assumptions of a particular group or individual. In discussing the messages authors impart through their texts, it is important to identify the perspective from which the story is told. By manipulating perspective, a writer can also manipulate a reader’s reaction to the story.

**Guiding Question concerning Perspective**

- Identify who in the fantasy text is good and who is evil;
- Identify the protagonist’s goal;
- Identify the antagonist’s goal;
• Does the fantasy novel present an obvious choice about who is good and who is evil? Does that influence your reaction as a reader to the characters?

• What language helps the reader identify the protagonist and antagonist? Is one associated with good? (i.e. associated with language that signals goodness, acceptance of or alignment with the society’s values and goals? Is one associated with evil, or a rejection of society’s values or goals?)

• From whose perspective is the story narrated? If the author uses multiple perspectives try to identify as many perspectives as possible. How do different characters represent different perspectives?

• How do the different perspectives alter/inform the reader’s understanding of the conflict in the novel?

• Is the author’s perspective identifiable? Does the author, through tone, language, imagery or plot, attempt to sway the reader’s expectations or emotional attachments to characters or groups in the story?

Language and Narrative

Social justice education seeks to increase students’ awareness of “social and economic inequalities in their communities,” and to challenge, question and transform their communities to be more just and equitable. Literature offers students the opportunity to experience life in alternative perspectives. By examining fantasy novels for examples of inequity and bias—language used to demonize Otherness—students can begin to recognize the way that language operates in their consensus reality to influence attitudes and behavior. This is especially important in understanding how attitudes are

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7 See Ronald T. Takaki, A Different Mirror for Young People: A History of Multicultural America (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012); Linda Christensen, Teaching for Joy and Justice (Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd., 2009); Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards, Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2010);
shaped concerning those outside the historical or perceived American mainstream. The following questions are intended to help clarify issues of Otherness in the fantasy text.

**Guiding Question concerning Language and Narrative**

- How do elements of the story (i.e. plot events, perspective, language) affect the way the reader perceives the antagonist? Of the protagonist?

- How does the author use language, imagery, and plot events (i.e. sources of conflict or struggle between characters) to influence readers’ perceptions of the antagonist? Of the protagonist?

- How does the language surrounding the antagonist affect the reader’s reaction to him or her? Of the protagonist?

- Does the author offer insight into the perspective of the antagonist? How might such a perspective alter the protagonist’s or the society’s understanding of the conflict in the story? How might it alter the reader’s understanding of the antagonist?

- How does language challenge or support a preconceived notion of the Other/antagonist in the story?

- Does the story model a change in perception of the antagonist? If so, how? If not, what prevents the characters from seeing one another differently?

- What prevents the reader from perceiving the goals or needs of the Other/antagonist as valid or equal to those of the protagonist?

**Applying Insight about Social Justice in a Fantasy Text to the Students’ World**

By identifying and analyzing the way authors portray the antagonists in a fantasy story, students begin to recognize similar language in the way the United States’ leaders’ rhetoric influences attitudes about its enemies. They identify the way mainstream American culture influences how we perceive those who we consider to be Other. Doing so allows them to begin to understand impediments to changing perceptions of marginalized groups, or those against whom the United States wages war.
Once students have gained understanding of how language, identity and perspective affect characters and conditions in the world of fantasy literature, they can begin to apply these same ideas to themselves and their own society. Ask them to look for similar language and tensions in the rhetoric concerning the conflicts in their own world. The questions need not change. Instead of asking how language affects the perception of an antagonist, ask how the language of social or news media influence the perception of a group, nation, or othered segment of the population.

In the consensus reality conflict over power, privilege, and inequality are widespread. Just as they analyzed a fantasy novel, by identifying the issues that cause conflict and the needs, demands, or aspirations of those who are portrayed as society’s enemies, students can clarify issues concerning conflict in the consensus reality. By identifying the perceptions of power, inequity, and privilege in a fantasy society, similar issues in a student’s own consensus reality become more visible.

When students connect concepts in the fantasy novel to aspects the consensus reality, they “peel back additional layers of meaning… and unpack metaphorical language” in works of literature. By doing so they also shed new light on their own world.

**Conclusions**

When students understand concepts of identity, perspective and language they are better able to recognize how they function in both a fantasy world and their consensus reality. When they recognize how writers influence readers and affect perceptions on

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those who are marginalized or demonized in fantasy novels, they are better able to recognize it the “real world.” When writers describe a fantasy enemy as savage or worthy of annihilation, they gain insight into the danger of the rhetoric of war and hate in their lives. When students explore conflict in a fantasy novel, they move beyond fantasy as entertainment to fantasy as social commentary.

In this thesis I argued that through the pages of a fantasy novel, authors offer hope, love and understanding as alternatives to war and as a means for overcoming hate and violence. Through examining a writer’s perspective about evil or the Other in their novels, students can begin to rise above their own limited horizons as Hans-Georg Gadamer described. Only by doing so can they take steps toward those whom they see as different and find understanding, equality and peace.

I hope that through the reading of books that depict otherness in all its richness, young people will begin to imagine a different sort of life than the one they experience through social media and the stereotyping of whole groups of people on-line, on television, in movies, and in news stories. If fantasy literature offers them new interpretations of otherness, perhaps young people can begin to remake the world into one in which differences can be celebrated, resources and power shared equitably, and justice for all members of society is the norm.


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