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**THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF FANTASY – A MULTIFOCALISED PERSPECTIVE ON THE FANTASTIC GENRE IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

**SUMMARY**

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The formidable success of novels like the *Harry Potter* series, films like *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, television series like *Game of Thrones*, or role-playing games like *Dungeons and Dragons* is a clear indicative that fantasy is not only immensely popular in contemporary society, but also manifests itself in various forms of art. With the rise of the Internet, fantasy’s wings have spread even further, with fan forums, online discussion boards, and fan fiction websites actively shaping the outcome of many fantastic creations. In a world where people have access to a virtually infinite number of books, Tolkien, Rowling, and Le Guin, along with a host of new fantasy writers, have become tremendously famous.

This popularity, however, has also been considered a downside of fantasy. Some critics accuse fantastic works of being merely escapist, with nothing substantial to provide for their readers. Others claim that the formulaic trait of fantasy, namely the use of the same well-known elements and archetypes, can only lead to its inclusion in the category of genre fiction, or “popular culture.” Nevertheless, the dismissal of fantasy as escapist or trivial implies the dismissal of its moral and ethical perspectives and the traditional values it perpetuates. It also means disregarding the positive effect it can have on its readers, as well as the fact that many children and teenagers become avid readers mainly due to their love of fantasy. Another issue is related to the reticence of the church towards (some forms of) fantastic writings. For instance, while Tolkien is widely accepted as a Christian writer who perpetuates Christian beliefs, Rowling and Le Guin have been criticised for their secular style, and there have been countless attempts to ban their books. Fundamental Christians have turned their attention especially to the *Harry Potter* novels, and are concerned that young readers will be influenced in ways that are contrary to the Church’s traditional moral norms. There have been claims that Rowling’s novels are rife with Wiccan and Pagan ideas, which will contribute to the decline of Western Christian civilisation.

All of the above debates and differences of opinion, coupled with fantasy’s undisputable fame, have led to the burning questions of *why* fantasy is so popular, and of *how* it functions in contemporary culture. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to provide an overview of the fantastic genre in the light of its relevance in today’s postmodern society. To this end, I have selected two literary critics whose ideas and lines of thought are relevant to the direction of fantasy in the twenty-first century, namely J. R. R. Tolkien, who explores the functions served by fantasy in his article “On Fairy-stories,” with special attention paid to its effect on the reader, and Brian Attebery, who provides meaningful insights into the structure of fantastic writings and provides a threefold examination of fantasy: as mode, genre, and formula. Together, these two distinctive critical directions – one from the twentieth, and one from the beginning of the twenty-first century – complete an initial picture which can help us acquire a better comprehension of fantasy. This preliminary image is then completed with the analysis of several topics replete with present interest, as they are reflected and refracted in four modern-day fantasy writings.

Three of the selected literary works, Tolkien’s Middle-earth quadrology, which includes *The Lord of the Rings* series and its prequel, *The Hobbit*, Ursula Le Guin’s *A Wizard of Earthsea*, and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, have canonical value not only in the fantastic genre, but also in the entirety of world literature, while Sarah J. Maas’ *House of Earth and Blood* is the first instalment of a series which promises to reshape adult fantasy in the upcoming decade. All these works are different from one another, both in their scope and structure, but they all contribute to the genre in highly relevant ways.

On account of the popularity of fantasy and due to the vast number of fantastic writings, selecting only a few theoretical frameworks and relevant literary creations and restricting my analysis to them has proven difficult. The first challenge encountered by anyone who undertakes a scrutiny of the fantasy genre is the lack of a clear-cut definition of *what*, exactly, fantasy is. In the last fifty years, critics have generally agreed that literary genres possess no defined boundaries, and no fixed forms. They are not simply overlapping circles, but often exist in a symbiotic relationship, converging, merging, and dissolving into new entities and subgenres. Thus, some critics and readers may consider certain works of fiction fantasy, while others might exclude them. Moreover, what is and is not regarded as fantasy may vary in time: for instance, today’s myths were once canonical belief and presented universally accepted ideas.

While it is true that critical theories vary greatly, a clear direction from the prescriptive to the descriptive can be observed. While a structuralist approach can offer valuable insight into the construction of a piece of fantasy, especially in a comparative study, it does not offer a complete picture of its workings. If Todorov and other structuralists were more concerned with hard data and disregarded elements like the influence of fantasy on the reader or socio-cultural milieus, nowadays the tendency is to be less focused on what fantasy *is*, and more concerned with what it *does*, and *how it acts*. I propose to call this characteristic *the actional approach* to fantasy, which is mainly concerned with how fantasy functions – or acts – and what its purposes are. In my study, this viewpoint will be complementary to a structural approach, resulting in an objective comparative study of several constituent elements of fantasy, analysed in the light of the actional approach. Thus, the rigid, unbiased structuralist investigation will be combined with a more “organic” approach, taking into special consideration the emotional effect that fantasy has on the readers.

This intuitive and creative response to reality in general, and literary creations in particular, is one of the most well-defining characteristics of postmodernism. Postmodernists display a deep distrust that the world around us can be explained in an objective and all-encompassing way, and the idea of originality and authenticity is undermined. Thus, postmodernist literary works do not claim to be new and original, but are built on old literary forms and genres, so inter- and paratextuality play an important role and are seen as a natural part of the creative process. Postmodernists also display an acute awareness of the negative effects of industrialization, consumerism, extreme digitalization, ecological threats, and political imbalance. In non-mimetic literature, this is usually translated into the escapist nature of fantastic works, which has been both criticised and praised, and has been further investigated in the first two chapters of this thesis.

My study proposes to examine the way in which fantasy functions in contemporary society and advances the idea that in the postmodern world of the 21st century, fantasy can often act in the same way myths and fairy tales could operate in the past. I argue that fantasy incorporates age-old values and structures which make it the (post)modern equivalent of moral teachings and stories. Moreover, I assert that contemporary fantasy presents postmodernist elements without foregoing traditional values and characteristics, which means it can suit the aesthetic tastes of more than one group of readers. To this end, I propose several ideas, divided into six chapters.

Chapter I, “Tolkien’s Faërian Fantasy – A Critical Approach to Fantastic Literature,” marks the first stepping stone in my exploration of fantasy and discusses J. R. R. Tolkien’s critical, rather than literary or philological, approach to fantasy. It provides an overview of Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy-stories,” which first had the shape of a lecture given at St. Andrews University in Scotland, in 1939. Published in its final form in 1964, the essay contains several formulations which have subsequently become a major source of influence and inspiration for critics and writers, alike. The first chapter examines Tolkien’s ideas on the origin and definition of fantasy, its delineating characteristics, its ideal readership, and – most importantly – the functions it can serve.

The escapist nature of fantasy was also discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, along with the other three functions proposed by Tolkien, Fantasy, Recovery, and Consolation. These four functions – especially Escape and Consolation – have become the core of my actional approach, as they are mainly concerned with the psychology of the readers and their emotional response to fantasy. Another paramount direction in the actional approach was provided by *Eucatastrophe*, a term coined by Tolkien to denote the positive turning of events in a fantastic story. This chapter considers Tolkien’s musings on the origin of fantastic works – for which he uses the umbrella-term “fairy-stories” – and his claims that fantasy is similar to a cauldron of simmering soup: myths, magical aspects, folk stories, romances, comedy, archetypal characters, and a plethora of other literary ingredients can be found in it, so a story-teller need only dip his ladder into the pot in order to come up with a story.

The first chapter also analyses Tolkien’s stand to the intended (and ideal) audience of fantastic works. The conclusion of his compelling analysis is that, contrary to popular belief, fantasy should not be enjoyed exclusively by children and teenagers. Although young people are more prone to suspend their disbelief in the reality of a dragon, for example, a good fantasy writer can accomplish the same effect on older, more experienced readers, too. This precept is in line with my postulation that fantasy is not meant exclusively for children and teenagers, and that labelling certain novels as “young adult and fantasy” can lead to a certain trivialisation on the part of the publishing companies.

Another important aspect of Tolkien’s theory is his belief that fantasy can assist both the author and the reader in coping with everyday life by presenting an alternate reality to the mundane one. With the aid of fantasy, we may go to foreign lands and experience strange emotions while being aware of our own surroundings. Tolkien himself used fantasy as a way of managing his own stress levels, first during his time serving in the First World War, then while dealing with the hardships of an over-industrialised world, and finally, when his son was enlisted in the army during the Second World War. Fantasy as a coping mechanism is also one of the crucial parts of the actional approach, as it is one of the strongest emotional responses experienced by readers.

By examining this theory, I have concluded that perhaps the most important role fulfilled by fantasy in contemporary society is precisely Tolkien’s idea that the reader can use the alternatives provided by fantastic worlds in order to cope with the real world. In a society which is slowly eroded by consumerism, unrealistic social media standards, over-industrialisation, military conflicts, pandemics, and a general sense of uncertainty and anxiety, Tolkien’s theory of the fantastic is perhaps even more relevant than it was at the time of its writing.

Chapter II, “Brian Attebery’s Beginner’s Guide to Fantasy,” explores a second approach to fantastic criticism, namely Brian Attebery’s views on fantasy, as he expresses them in his 1992 study, *Strategies of Fantasy.* The American critic is the first who did not only accept Tolkien’s definition of fantasy, but also put forth the idea that this definition is valid in the postmodern context. He begins his discussion of the fantastic with the view that fantasy is a type of literature that has intrinsic value, a notion also shared by this thesis. Attebery’s study is neither an endorsement of fantasy, nor an assessment of this type of literature, and he does not argue that certain fantastic works are more valuable than others. Instead, his book investigates how fantasy achieves its objectives, with a descriptive and explanatory, rather than an evaluative goal. This chapter also highlights Attebery’s delimitations of fantasy as genre, mode, and formula, as it argues that the formulaic elements of the fantastic are the crucial, but misunderstood characteristics of fantasy.

With a view to the actional approach, I would argue that the most widely encountered interpretation is fantasy as formula, since the formulaic elements of fantasy, such as archetypal characters, settings, magical beings, and narrative conventions, are the most easily recognisable and relatable parts of a piece of fantasy. Moreover, I have asserted that, rather than being perceived as boring or ordinary, the most widely known formulaic components of fantasy have the greatest impact on the readership. Therefore, the formulaic constituents of fantasy, as well as their strong effect on the readers, have served as a starting point in the analysis of my selected literary works. Another important point made by Attebery is fantasy’s strong relationship with Postmodernism. After inspecting his arguments and examples, I have concluded that although, at first sight, a fantastic story which is set in a quasi-medieval world and exhibits traditional moral values and teachings is not compatible with the postmodernist direction, the exact opposite is true. Tolkien’s traditionally Christian *Lord of the Rings*, Le Guin’s coming-of-age story, *Earthsea*, and even the story of a teenage wizard who studies in a castle, like Rowling’s *Harry Potter*, all encompass strongly postmodern characteristics. Some examples include the metafictionality of Tolkien’s novel, where we can often see stories within stories, as well as the return to older narrative forms (myths, legends, fairy tales); the fluidity of Rowling’s narrative, and the playfulness of her language (she often comes up with witty names and spells); or the variety of themes found in Le Guin’s series, all of which are strongly tied to postmodern concerns. A completely different approach can be seen in Maas’s *House of Earth and Blood*, which is in stark contrast to “traditional” fantasy stories, as it is set in a highly technologised world, where smartphones and televisions are as common as mermaids and werewolves. This being said, Maas’s story is still in line with Tolkien’s tradition and Attebery’s theories, as well as with my own actional approach.

One of the most important formulaic elements of fantasy is analysed in Chapter III, “Heroic Stereotypes and Stereotypical Heroes in Fantasy Literature.” Drawing upon Joseph Campbell’s theory of the Monomyth and Brian Attebery’s ideas of fantasy as formula, this section discusses the journey of two fantastic heroes, Harry Potter – from J. K. Rowling’s eponymous series – and Bryce Quinlan, the protagonist of Sarah J. Maas’s *House of Earth and Blood*. Campbell argues that the hero’s journey follows three stages, namely Departure, Initiation, and Return, a threefold structure which can be found in numerous other manifestations, such as Hell-Purgatory-Heaven, introduction-exposition-resolution, birth-life-death, or the cyclicity of the seasons. These three stages are further split into seventeen sub-stages, which are all analysed in more depth and detail in this thesis. Attebery’s view on the coming of age of female protagonists, as opposed to male heroes, constitutes another important part of my approach in this chapter, as it aligns with contemporary, postmodern social and political views. By comparing these two characters and applying the Monomyth to their stories, I have brought forward the idea that all fantasy protagonists share a universal storyline. I have also contended that readers are so familiar with this storyline that they can easily recognize it in other works, and are able to identify with it in their everyday life. Chapter III, therefore, is an attempt to answer several important questions: how does the hero function in fantasy and why is this concept universally accepted? What ties all fantasy protagonists together and what does this ubiquity mean for the study of fantasy?

The first question posed by this section, “How does the hero function in fantasy?,” can be answered with relative ease after the examination of the two characters: fantastic heroes, either from fantasy literature, myths, movies, or fairy tales, act in a similar way to one another. More importantly, they function as a universal symbol of the everyday struggles that the readers can face in the real world, while also offering alternatives and various resolutions which can be translated to our daily lives. This is also one of the reasons why the hero’s journey is universally accepted and widely employed by creators of fantasy. Another reason, I would argue, is that it is one of the age-old formulaic elements of fantasy, one that has not suffered many changes along time. The formula can, of course, be altered in order to fit a certain society’s standards or a specific period’s mindset, but its essence remains the same: all heroes are first initiated, then face a series of trials which change them radically, only to come back to their prior lives and to bestow their boon on the world.

Another important element taken into consideration in this chapter was Attebery’s outlook on the coming-of-age process of female and male protagonists, which is one of the possible changes suffered by the hero’s journey. Since fantasy largely relies on traditional themes and motifs, the story is more often than not centred around a male protagonist. Moreover, the emergence of modern-day fantasy in the late nineteenth – early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of mostly male writers. However, what is referred to as “third-wave feminism” has altered much of western society over the last thirty years or more. This trend is also evident in fantasy fiction, where an increasing number of female authors have arisen in a genre once dominated by males, and an increasing number of convincing female heroines have assumed roles previously held by male heroes.

Consequently, the nature of the hero – or heroine – has become even more universal and multi-faceted. What does this ubiquity mean for the study of fantasy? I would argue that it provides yet another “safety net” for the reader to wield when using fantasy as a means to escape the troubles of everyday life, while also bringing forth a sense of belonging. It is important for readers, especially for younger ones, to feel that they can relate to others, that their problems and struggles are also encountered by other people (even powerful wizards or superheroes), because it means that they can be overcome. This phenomenon goes beyond popular hashtags used on social media, like “#relatable” or “#metoo,” simply because it is experienced at the core level of our humanity. I would go as far as to claim that this powerful response to the fantastic characters’ journey is one of the main reasons for the immense popularity of this genre.

The ubiquitous nature of formulaic elements in fantasy is further explored in Chapter IV, “Into the Wilderness – A Modern-day Menagerie of Magical Creatures.” While the journey of the hero is essential in the fantastic storyline, there is also a different type of journey, one undertaken by the reader. The exploration of extraordinary worlds means a mental trip through human imagination, and along the way the reader often encounters fabulous beings, which are either the protagonists of fantastic stories, or mere inhabitants of imaginary realms. Whether we call them “fantastic,” “magical,” or “mythical,” these “animals,” “beasts,” “creatures,” or “beings” have been a quintessential part of world mythology and, although their role has changed significantly, they still represent a matter of interest for the contemporary man. Chapter IV begins with a short history of these beings, and discusses their relevance in today’s culture and in the mindset of the postmodern man, all in the light of the profound, yet strenuous, relationship between humans and animals.

The aim of this short presentation was to provide a structure for a better understanding of how magical beings are being conceived in today’s postmodern culture. I have demonstrated that these mythical beasts have undergone vast changes throughout time: in Antiquity, they were perceived as something natural and normal, and they were included in history and biology books; in medieval times, they populated maps and acquired a status of fierce protectors or ferocious predators, something to avoid and be afraid of; with the rise of Humanism and the Renaissance, magical beings slowly became the stuff of myths, as there was vast scientific evidence against their authenticity; finally, modernism, and especially postmodernism brought back mythical beings into the limelight of art and literature, and a clear resurrection and re-evaluation could be witnessed. Today, fabulous beasts are undergoing yet another transformation. Contemporary fantasists are free to employ archetypal imagery of strange beings in whatever way they see appropriate, either as a classical portrayal of a well-known symbol, an inverted picture of the same sign, a contradiction between the human and the animal, or an allegory for postmodern themes.

This chapter has examined contemporary images of well-known magical creatures, such as unicorns, centaurs, mermaids, the Sphinx, the Phoenix, werewolves, serpents, and dragons, as they appear in all four chosen literary works, with a particular emphasis on the evolution of these entities over time. It has also been shown that while some creatures, such as the Phoenix, have largely maintained their original symbolism and roles, others, like the Dragon, have a more fluid nature and have undergone more changes over time. The purpose of this brief research was to demonstrate that, even when altered, metamorphosed, or reduced, the picture of a magical creature may provoke strong responses and convey critical messages to the twenty-first-century reader. I have concluded that, in the postmodern world, the role of fantastic beings goes beyond the plot of the novel, film, or computer game that they “inhabit.” Today, as never before, creators can use these creatures to address critical themes such as animal rights, environmentalism, and human-animal interactions, with some resorting to the use of fabulous beings as metaphorical representations of contemporary issues.

Strangely enough, sexualisation and sexual identity, satire, politics, urbanisation, and digitalisation can now co-exist with creatures from ancient mythology in a harmonious way, and so, the reader does not perceive this relationship as something forced or artificial. Thus, while hundreds of years ago, fantastic beings were used to explain natural phenomena and were worshipped in temples, today they provide a framework for a better understanding of the self and of others. In the light of this short analysis, I propose that as long as these imaginary creatures live in our collective consciousness and influence the collective unconscious, it could be argued that they are, in a way, real.

While fantastic creatures can be employed to convey profound messages, fantasy also provides its readers with important moral teachings, and some of them were examined in the fifth chapter, “A 21st Century Perspective on Moral and Ethical Issues in Fantasy.” In my exploration of fantasy literature, I have argued that the way it embodies and transforms intrinsic moral and ethical ideals enables readers to comprehend the postmodern culture in which they live and to adjust and embrace these principles as their own. Additionally, I have contended that the ideals portrayed in fantasy are universal in scope and have a formative effect from a moral and ethical standpoint.

The first step in demonstrating these ideas was to identify some of the moral and ethical issues dealt with by fantasy literature and to corroborate them with theoretical frameworks and practical illustrations. As a consequence, this section has explored issues such as the conflict between good and evil, classism and racism, and slavery, as they are depicted in J. R. R. Tolkien’s canonical *The Lord of the Rings*, J. K. Rowling’s internationally acclaimed *Harry Potter* series, and Sarah J. Maas’s highly promising novel *House of Earth and Blood*. I have also applied Brian Attebery’s theory of archetypal patterns in fantasy and Tolkien’s concept of Eucatastrophe while examining fantastic morality. After identifying these three moral issues, I have analysed the way in which contemporary readers can understand and interpret them, as well as their relevance in today’s postmodern society. I have come to the conclusion that the transmission and comprehension of these matters depends greatly on the archetypal, or formulaic, patterns employed by writers. Consequently, it is fairly easy for readers of any age and background to sympathise with oppressed characters and to understand the conflict between positive and negative forces because these issues can be found in all types of stories, from the earliest nursery rhymes to the most well-established canonical texts.

The interpretation of these values, on the other hand, is partly dependent on each reader’s individual mindset and circumstances, and partly influenced by the writer’s personal style. Therefore, Tolkien’s narrative can be seen as “universal,” as it is the closest to traditional folk and fairy tales, and can therefore appeal to a broad audience; Rowling’s novels, with their simple, straightforward narrative style, are more suitable for younger readers, while Mass employs a forthright, almost brutal style in order to convey her messages, as she writes mainly for adult readers. Regarding the relevance of age-old moral and ethical values in contemporary culture and society, I have concluded that there can be no doubt about their significance. Not only does postmodernism entail a return to traditional values but, I strongly believe that these values, although transformed and adapted, will always be a part of humanity’s inherent nature. Frameworks and parameters may change over time, but people will always distinguish between Good and Evil and will identify instances of racism and exploitation. As long as this is the case, there will also be literary texts displaying these issues, and, since archetypes are the most facile way to illustrate them, the fantastic genre will remain the most suited for this enterprise.

The sixth and final chapter of my thesis, “Messages of Hope – The Positive Values Carried by Fantasy,” was conceived as a mirrored image of the previous chapter. While fantasy is frequently used to portray ethical dilemmas and moral precepts, it also offers positive values, called “messages of hope” in this study. As with fairy tales and myths, fantastic writings do not stop at highlighting concerns; they also conclude with a resolution. I have argued that, similarly to fairy tales, important principles such as the power of love, self-sacrifice for the salvation of others, the understanding of human responsibility and the consequences of personal decisions, and, eventually, redemption and the completion of Eucatastrophe, bring about this resolution. Moreover, all of these concepts are intrinsic to the hero’s fate and can only be accomplished through numerous hardships; yet, they are necessary for both the hero’s evolution and the story’s conclusion.

This chapter has striven to offer a thorough examination of the themes of self-sacrifice and the power of love, as well as redemption and Eucatastrophe, with an emphasis on the role of human choices and responsibilities on these topics. To this extent, the *Harry Potter* series and *House of Earth and Blood* have been examined for their manifestations of self-sacrifice and the power of love, while *The Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Lord of the Rings* have been studied for their themes of redemption and Eucatastrophe.

Another fascinating subject explored in this chapter is the presence of ethically ambiguous characters in contemporary fantasy, as well as the public’s interest in these ambivalent characters. As a conclusion to this thesis’s comparative analysis, I have offered guidelines for interpreting several morally grey characters from my chosen primary texts: Ged from *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Severus Snape from *Harry Potter*, Boromir from *The Lord of the Rings*, and Hunt Athalar from *House of Earth and Blood*. After the analysis of these anti-heroes, I have observed that their popularity can be explained by the ever-transforming moral compass of the postmodern world. In this era, ambiguous characters are best suited to mirror both the uncertainty of our society, and the remodelled inner morality of the 21st-century man.

Tolkien’s opinion that a good fantasy story must always have a happy ending might be seen by some as naïve and childish, but this chapter has demonstrated quite the opposite. Fantasy, particularly well-written fantasy, usually comprises elements of wise lessons, optimistic outlooks, and messages of hope. When written for children or teenagers, fantastic works frequently demonstrate these lessons more explicitly, so that young readers may have no problem grasping their meaning. The more complex the literary piece becomes and the older the intended audience is, the more subtly the principles are interwoven into the story. Despite this minor distinction, reading multiple fantasy novels reveals that they *all* contain some form of moral lesson, and always highlight a positive perspective.

This chapter has questioned the origin of this universal tendency and has inferred that it arises from human psychology. Although the strongest emotional impact comes from experiencing negative things (which is why the issues discussed in Chapter V can be so striking), on the long term, people are deeply influenced by matters which lead to positive emotions. Moreover, the anxiety and uncertainty of the postmodern era has led to an increased need for a sense of hope. Originally, this sprang from church doctrines and the hope that one may end up in Heaven and that, at the Second Coming, Jesus would redeem men’s sins once more. With the church’s power gradually waning, especially in today’s secular postmodernist environment, these constructive messages are increasingly delivered through other media, including fantasy fiction. This chapter has also sought to establish that although the traditional teachings of the church are gradually being transformed, the messages remain the same: through good deeds, one will eventually get one’s happy ending and there is always hope for a positive outcome.

While studying the vast genre of fantasy and conducting my research for this treatise, I have come to the conclusion that there are numerous pathways to future research and directions of study to take. Thus, a comprehensive exploration of the moral and ethical values perpetuated by fantasy, as well as their correlation with traditional ideas expressed in fairy tales and biblical texts could be the object of a standalone study. The ethics of fantasy could also be set side by side with the aesthetics of fantasy, in order to determine the relationship between the two seemingly unrelated fields. Jung’s theory of archetypes and its applicability to fantasy, as well as archetypal themes and motifs and the role they serve in contemporary fantasy could also serve as starting points for a different direction of study.

Whereas this paper touched upon the allegorical representations of several magical creatures, symbolism in general, and the symbolic value of certain objects, places, numbers, and characters could also represent an interesting expansion of my research. Thus, the analysis of symbols like labyrinths, mirrors, the number seven, or the four elements could shine further light on the workings of fantasy and its intrinsic impact upon the reader. Another fascinating area of inquiry is the origin of the numerous terms and names used (or developed) for fantasy; even a cursory examination of words reveals certain linguistic patterns, while the meanings and usage of the terms themselves would be worthwhile to explore more, especially in the works of the great linguist Tolkien, or of Rowling, who is known for her proclivity to use language playfully. Thus, one could explore Tolkien’s use of Old English as a source of inspiration for most of the names coined for his universe, including “Middle-earth,” “Frodo,” and “Samwise,” or delve into the intricacies of the Greek and Latin languages, as well as world mythology, in Rowling’s wizarding world. Related to symbolism and etymology, the study of topography in fantasy could also open new doors and possibilities. Umberto Eco’s *The Book of Legendary Lands* is a good point of departure in this inquiry, to which one might add Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope, in order to examine the castle of Hogwarts, Mount Doom, the Earthsea Archipelago, the modern city of Lunathion, and – for the sake of expanding the number of primary texts – Holdstock’s Mythago Wood (from his eponymous novel), Naomi Novik’s Scholomance, and even Terry Pratchett’s Discworld.

In a study focused on current world issues, rather than on structural elements, one could choose environmentalism and ecocriticism as an alternative avenue for research. For as long as mankind has existed on our planet, environmental hazards have also existed. Industrialization concerned the majority of environmentalists at the turn of the nineteenth century, similarly to the way climate change does now. While non-fiction and literary fiction works have been crucial in the development of ecocriticism, the fantasy genre has frequently been disregarded by major ecocriticism thinkers. Nevertheless, I would argue that fantasy literature is highly significant to the subject because its authors incorporate ecological themes and storylines into their works, while also adhering to particular literary ecocritical traditions. Notable examples include Tolkien who, as previously shown in this thesis, is concerned with the effects of industrialisation and war and uses his fictional works in order to draw attention to these pressing matters, but also postmodernist writers, such as Robert Holdstock in his *Mythago Wood* trilogy, and Charles de Lint in *Moonheart* and *Greenmantle*. Thus, an analysis of particular ecological threats and their portrayal in fantastic works, as well as fantasy writers’ possible contribution to environmental consciousness, could also be expanded upon.

Perhaps one of the most important factors of influence on the evolution and perception of fantasy is represented by film and game adaptations of fantastic texts. The ludolisation, or the transfer of (fantastic) novels into game form, as well as movie adaptations, play a crucial part in the popularity of fantasy. As stated before, no study of the genre can be complete without taking into account the immense influence of computer games and films. These visual representations of the written text often become even more popular and widespread that the original, and they can even influence the author in the writing of a sequel or of a new novel. The exact way in which games and films influence the evolution of the fantastic genre, as well as the scope of this influence, could be the subject of another type of research in the field of fantasy.

All of the above proposals, together with numerous others, such as queer and gender studies, pedagogical methods that resort to using fantasy texts in the classroom, or exploring the upcoming novels of the *Crescent City* series, demonstrate the ample possibilities of future study which spring from this thesis. The vastness of research alternatives shows both scholars and lovers of fantasy the multi-faceted, kaleidoscopic nature of this genre.