'The tale is the map which is the territory':
From Fantasy and Metafiction to Metafantasy and Neil Gaiman

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool
for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by

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October 2015

Abstract

Critical theory concerning the genre of fantasy has been steadily growing since the 1970s, yet one area concerning the dynamics of its narrative structure and the self-revealing nature of that structure has been left largely, and surprisingly, unexplored. Analysing the critical theories about fantasy, its functions and components, reveals the inherent connections between the genre and the literary technique of metafiction, and demonstrates that fantasy is a metafictive genre of literature. This occurs because fantasy is a form predicated on the conscious act of storytelling coupled with the purposeful awareness of the impossibility of its subject matter – the Fantastic. This thesis proposes that through its dependant and sustained intertext and hypertext, the genre of fantasy is perpetually and blatantly connected to a historical taproot that informs its subject and fuels the wonder it produces in the reader.

The fact that fantasy does this has allowed for a newer form, metafantasy, to emerge, that takes modern fantasy as its taproot, subverting and deconstructing it into a meta-metafictive object. By analysing this metafictive reaction to an already metafictive genre through the works of renowned new-wave fabulist Neil Gaiman, this thesis aims to account for the current genre-centric literary phenomena observed by many contemporary fantasy critics. This thesis, therefore, entails a comparative critical genre theory as well as a literary analysis of fantasy, metafiction, transtextuality, and genre evolution applied to the fantasy metatext as well as to Neil Gaiman's oeuvre. 'The tale is the map which is the territory' because in fantasy, the genre is as much the object as the subject it itself seeks to deconstruct.

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Acknowledgements

The author of this thesis wishes to recognize the following individuals who have been instrumental in providing guidance, support, advice, respite, and innumerable amounts of coffee and pastries: Carlos N. Garcia Velazquez and Celeste Siino Tristani (long-suffering parents), Carlos E. and Guillermo J. (amusing younger brothers), Jomarie Mateo Rivera (my sisterly bff), Andy Sawyer (my invaluable supervisor) and David Seed (my other invaluable supervisor who pointed out I tend to go on many tangents), and all of the PhD cohorts, many of whom lead the way first: Molly, Maria, Michelle, Monika, Margaret, Frances, Natalie, Lee, Glyn, Chris, Emma, Bethan, Sophie, Dave, and Hana.

Most of all, I am thankful to God for leading me to this point, and trust in His guidance for the path ahead.

Introduction

> *The definition of a fairy-story – what it is, or what it should be – does not,
> then, depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy, but upon
> the nature of Faërie: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that
> country. I will not attempt to define that, not to describe it directly. It cannot
> be done. Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its
> qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible.*[1]

Tolkien might be referring specifically to fairy-stories here, though he does later
make similar assertions about fantasy, but the nature of Faerie's indefinability is one
echoed by many, if not most, fantasy scholars. In the introduction to *Fantastic
Literature*, David Sandner asks whether the fantastic is a subversive literature or one
of nostalgic belatedness, concluding that it is both, adding that the fantastic is
'notoriously difficult to define'.[2] Rosemary Jackson similarly opens her critical book
with '[Fantasy's] association with imagination and with desire had made it an area
difficult to articulate or to define, and indeed the "value" of fantasy has seemed to
reside in precisely this resistance to definition'.[3] Farah Mendlesohn acknowledges
the debate over defining the genre, in particular the consensus of utilising a 'range of
critical definitions' as viable 'fuzzy sets' instead of subscribing to one single
definition in the same way that fantasy as a genre itself is comprised of 'fuzzy sets'.[4]

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[1] J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', in *The Critic and the Monster*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 114.

[2] David Sandner, ed., 'Introduction', in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (London: Praeger, 2004), pp. 1, 9.

[3] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 1.

[4] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. xiii; Brian Attebery, 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula', *Fantastic Literature*, ed. by David Sandner, pp. 293-309 (p. 304). See also Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy* where the above essay was originally published in 1992 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

The difficulty in defining fantasy comes from a number of contributing factors: the inherent difficulty in defining 'genre', fantasy's simultaneously long and short history, and fantasy's subject matter along with the relationship between its fiction-making and reality. On the first, as Robert Scholes puts it: 'no genre is itself ever complete – it is modified […] by each new work of imagination – […] because the system itself is always open, with weak or neglected genres offering increasingly attractive possibilities for writers driven to "make it new"'.[5] Modern genre theorists, who will be employed in the final chapter of this work, make similar assertions about how each work added to any genre transforms and changes that genre so that its definition is more a description of its characteristics and apparent fundamental features at a given point in time, and less of a controlled and closed system.[6] It is no different with fantasy and the rest of the fantastic – or speculative fictions in general – in large part because, as Gary K. Wolfe puts it:

> [The] fantastic genres of horror, science fiction, and fantasy have been unstable literary isotopes virtually since their evolution into identifiable narrative modes, or at least into identifiable market categories, a process which began a century or more ago and has not entirely worked itself through even yet.[7]

This desire to define fantasy comes in large part as a result of the increase in the production of fantasy, the delineation of a marketable category – thanks in large part to Lin Carter's highly popular Ballantine Adult Fantasy series (1969-1974) – and the rise of postmodern criticism. However, while these contributed to this scholarly

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[5] Robert Scholes, 'Foreword', in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, by Tzvetan Todorov (New York: Cornell University, 1975), pp. viii-ix.
[6] See Chapter 3, and David Duff's *Modern Genre Theory* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2000).
[7] Gary K. Wolfe, 'Malebolge, Or the Ordnance of Genre', in *New Wave Fabulists*, ed. by Bradford Morrow and Peter Straub, Conjunctions Series, 39 (New York: Bard College, 2002), pp. 405-419 (p. 405) (originally published in 1992).

interest in the genre, one aspect that is mentioned but often glossed over is the acknowledgement of fantasy's own inherent self-identifying assertion to be something other than what is regarded as norm, be that reality or the consensus of what constitutes reality.[8] It is this subversive – or at the very least, contradictory – stance that contributes to the genre's apparent fuzziness. In this sense, fantasy demands definition as much as it resists it, or more accurately, as this thesis will show, it thrives on challenging perceptions, particularly those concerning literature.[9] In doing so, it presupposes, suggests, and implies perceptions – as much of the actual world, of reality, and of fantasy and other literature – only to then deviate from them.[10] The history of the critical scholarship on fantasy is then just as tied to the history of the genre itself, as identifying the genre's origins is intrinsic to understanding its impetus to challenge perceptions.

During the second half of the twentieth century, critical scholarship turned its eye to fantasy in an attempt, as stated above, to describe and define it. Part of the problem of this endeavour is that in defining what something is or is not, a lot of material can be, and has been, unintentionally ignored. This is compounded by many critics' attempt to validate the genre by focusing solely on what they consider to be respected and critically valid texts. This is evident in early fantastic and fantasy

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[8] Wolfe, 'Malebolge', p. 415.

[9] David Sandner, 'Theorizing the Fantastic: Editing *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* and the Six Stages of Fantasy Criticism', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 4 (2006), 277-301 (p. 292).

[10] In *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), Stefan Ekman proposes using the term 'actual world', borrowed from possible-worlds semantics, to refer to 'the world inhabited by the reader and the writer' and 'primary world' to refer to the 'literary construct whose setting imitates, on a general level […] the actual world' (p. 10). The terms 'real world' and 'reality' will also be used in this thesis, more often than 'primary world', to denote the consensus and perception of a true and actual world (including, presumably, the universe and all cosmological and phenomenological things in it) that lies in opposition to the consensus of what is impossible (a concept which will be described ahead). Realist fiction does not, then, depict the actual world, but acceptable representations of what is broadly agreed to be reality.

scholarship, as many texts that readers, authors, and critics (not to mention publishers and booksellers) of the twenty-first century would easily consider to belong to 'modern fantasy' were instead completely absent, or at best marginalised, by the structuralist approaches of theorists like Tzvetan Todorov.[11] Todorov defines the 'fantastic' instead of 'fantasy', as all narrative forms that depart from realistic depictions of the actual world by describing 'a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, or vampires, [where] there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world'. By describing it thus, Todorov's 'fantastic', theoretically, includes fantasy, science fiction, and horror (and all other forms of texts where unexplainable events, from the perspective of the actual world, happen), however in practice, it excludes most of what is now considered to be traditional modern fantasy, or indeed modern fantastic.[12] Indeed, *The Fantastic*, published in French in 1970, contains no mention of George MacDonald, Lord Dunsany, E. R. Eddison, James Branch Cabell, G. K. Chesterton, Tolkien, Mervyn Peake, or even William Morris, and makes barely a passing remark about Arthur Machen. The most fantastic writers he mentions are Edgar Allan Poe, H. P. Lovecraft, and E. T. A. Hoffman, and the rest of his primary texts are ones that would more readily now be labelled as absurdist, surrealist, and symbolic fiction, or plainly realist.[13]

These texts, while possessing similar fantastic traits, do not have the same function as fantasy (not even the fantastic marvellous). Whether allegorical or symbolic, or

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[11] Or later by critics like Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981).

[12] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 25.

[13] Todorov's main examples include Henry James, Franz Kafka, Gerard de Nerval, and Count Jan Potocki, in addition to Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Charles Maturin, the latter ones which he uses as examples of the 'fantastic marvellous'.

moving into other branches of the broadly fantastic by seeking to explain the supernatural according to the laws of the actual natural world, their purpose is not to tell stories about the fantastic elements alluded to. Other critics have suffered from similar prejudices, as when Colin Manlove, though offering insightful theories regarding wonder and the 'impossible' in fantasy, dismisses 'comic' and 'escapist' fantasies for being 'fanciful' and for 'carrying either no deeper meaning or one lacking in vitality' because 'the reader's pleasure [is] in the invented characters or situations' but 'not so much for its symbolic importance as for the sense of wonder that invests it'.[14] Into this 'class' of 'escapist fantasies', Manlove places William Morris, Dunsany, Eddison, Cabell, 'and the more dubious hosts of Hope Mirrlees, Hannes Bok, Lin Carter *et al.*at present being turned out by Ballantine'.[15] Manlove's dismissiveness prevents him from seeing the value of these texts, but not from analysing them, which is more than can be said for Todorov.

Nevertheless, Todorov's influence in early fantasy genre scholarship cannot be disputed, especially because his notion of hesitation before the fantastic and the subsequent choosing of a wondrous or uncanny explanation in the text is still relevant to the doubling response modern fantasy invites. While Todorov's impression of the 'fantastic' in practice will not be adhered to in this study, because, as Clute comments, 'the impact of his definition of the fantastic is of less use in the study of FANTASY, where the MARVELLOUS is not a problematic to be solved, but a given', there are, however, two arguments to be made concerning his

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[14] Colin N. Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 11.
[15] Manlove, p. 11.

terminology and its usage in modern fantasy genre theory.[16] The first is that

Todorov's 'marvellous' is not, in practice, through the examples he uses, entirely

comparable to the sense of wonder and the marvellous experienced in fantasy (see

the discussion on 'the impossible' and 'wonder' ahead). On the other hand, his

notion of 'hesitation' before the unexplainable is, however ill-applied, still relevant

to the discussion of fantasy texts and the purposefully arresting reactions they

induce, although, as will be seen in Chapter One, it is less of a brief encounter and

more of a sustained contradiction.

For Todorov, the genre of the fantastic only exists within the moment of hesitation

or uncertainty in the face of a seemingly supernatural encounter. It occurs when the

reader 'must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from "reality" as it

exists in the common opinion'. At this point, if they decide that 'the laws of reality

remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described' the work

'belongs to another genre: the uncanny' and if they decide that 'new laws of nature

must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the

marvelous'.[17] At the moment this decision is reached, the reader 'emerges from the

fantastic'.[18] The problems with this structure, in addition to the aforementioned lack

of truly fantastic (especially 'marvellous') texts, is that it implies that a genre only

exists or that a work only belongs to a genre for a hesitatory period of time, only so

long as its reader has not decided or has not been informed by the narrative of

whether they should explain the supernatural using the rules of the actual world or

new ones. Under this impractical model, the supposed Todorovian genre of the

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[16] John Clute, 'Todorov, Tzvetan', in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), p. 950.
[17] Todorov, p. 41.
[18] Todorov, p. 41.

fantastic would have to be necessarily devoid of works once the moment of

hesitation is passed as, they truly belong in either the uncanny or the marvellous

genres.

For the purposes of this study, the term 'the fantastic' will be applied either as

historically used by science fiction (henceforth, sf) and fantasy critics as a 'blanket

description of both sf and fantasy' (i.e., the 'fantastic genres', to which can also be

added horror, and other subgenres), or as a near synonym for the 'supernatural' that

is used to create intentionally-fictional fantasy stories.[19] This is because while the

supernatural can occur in both fantastic and realist fiction, depending on the

inclinations of the author, his environment, and his readers, the concept of the

fantastic used here will be reserved for the 'impossible'. This is not the merely

supernaturally impossible, but in a literal consciously intentional sense meaning

'existing only in imagination'.[20] In other words, it will largely be employed as an

adjective noun for fantasy. The fantastic marvel of fantasy, thus, is not merely a

given in the sense that it is accepted without question or without solving the

problematic between the laws of nature and the laws of fantasy, but born out of, as

Mike Ashley suggests, 'the awareness of its achievement'.[21] Fantasy is not

marvellous because it narrates unexplained supernatural events, but because it

narrates the fantastic, or as Clute puts it, 'fantasy is a way to tell stories about the

fantastic'.[22] This is intrinsically tied to the genre's history and origins.

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[19] Gary Westfahl, 'Fantastic', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 335.
[20] *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*)[Accessed 18 June 2015]
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68107?redirectedFrom=fantastic#eid>
[21] Mike Ashley, 'Marvellous', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 628.
[22] Clute, p. 338.

Fantasy, as a genre, has a relatively shorter history than expected of a form that claims such '"ancient" timelessness', yet, at the same time, because of its self-awareness and metafictive correspondences, it has grown, changed, and adapted to reflect concerns about fiction, culture, and the production of fantasy narratives themselves (which this thesis explicates).[23] As such, while definitions for the 'fantastic' and for 'fairytales' date as far back to 1798 and 1800, with the brothers A. W. and Frederich Schlegel debating over the rules of fairy tales and fantastic literature of the time, 'only in the last decades of the 18th century […] did a delimitable genre now called FANTASY appear'.[24] In the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Clute makes a distinction, based on function and intention, between fantasy and what he calls the genre's 'taproot texts'. The difference in function, as he implies through his examples, is that in a fantasy text the purpose of the fantastic and supernatural elements is to tell a fantasy narrative, i.e., to create a work mediated through and defined by those elements.[25] The difference in intention, or perhaps more accurately in reception, is further historically-bound.

Contemporary critics will generally agree that, if there is one essential characteristic to whatever is to be called 'fantasy' in modern fantasy narratives, it is its 'impossibility'. In 1975 Colin Manlove defined 'wonder' in fantasy as 'anything from crude astonishment at the marvelous, to a sense of "meaning-in-the-mysterious" or even of the numinous' which is 'generated by fantasy purely from the presence of the supernatural or impossible, and from the element of mystery and lack of explanation that goes with it'.[26] Later, in *Critical Terms for Science Fiction*

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[23] Sandner, 'Theorizing the Fantastic', p. 283.
[24] Wolfe, p. 408; Clute, p. 921.
[25] Clute, p. 921.
[26] Manlove, p. 162.

and Fantasy (1986), Gary K. Wolfe defines fantasy as 'a fictional narrative describing events that the reader believes to be <u>Impossible</u>', echoing an earlier statement that 'whatever we are to call "fantasy" must first and foremost deal with the impossible'.[27] This he (and others) derived mainly from W.R. Irwin who described fantasy as 'the literature of the impossible' and proposed that fantasy writers 'take as *their point of departure* the deliberate violation of norms and facts we regard as essential to our conventional conception of 'reality,' in order to create an imaginary counter-structure or counter-norm'.[28] Brian Attebery likewise frequently asserts this, proposing that the 'fundamental premise of fantasy is that the things it tells not only did not happen but could not have happened'.[29] However, as with a difference in the purpose to which these impossible elements are put, the reception and characterisation of those elements as 'impossible' begs the question, as Sandner puts it, of 'impossible to whom?'.[30] Sandner continues:

> [We] can note that Wolfe carefully writes that fantasy included "events […] the reader believes to be impossible." So, which reader? Beliefs change, and the world is not so clearly knowable that we can say it is what it is for all time, unchanged by changes in belief. […] Worded that way, older works that existed in shadowy times when they *might* have been believed can be left aside as only possibly fantasy, as taproots to the genre itself. The genre, on a longer look, is not as ancient as it might first seem.[31]

Clute argues that whatever is to be called 'impossible' must be tied to cultural perceptions, receptions, and intentions of the 'impossible':

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[27] Wolfe, *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Westport: CN, Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 271; 'Malebolge' p. 222.
[28] S.C. Fredericks, 'Problems of Fantasy', *Science-Fiction Studies*, 5 (1978), p. 37.
[29] Attebery, *Stories About Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 4.
[30] Sandner, 'Theorizing the Fantastic', p. 284.
[31] Sandner, p. 284.

> Before the beginning of the scientific revolution in Western Europe in the
> 16th century, most Western literature contained huge amounts of material
> 20th-century readers would think of as fantastic. It is, however, no simple
> matter to determine the degree to which various early writers distinguished,
> before the rise of science, between what we would call fantastical and what
> we would call realistic. Nor is it possible with any certainty to determine
> how much various early writers perceived stories which adhered to possible
> events and stories which did not as being different. There is no easy division
> between realism and the fantastical in writers before 1600 or so, and no
> genre of written literature, before about the early 19th century, seems to have
> been constituted so as deliberately to confront or contradict the "real".[32]

It should be noted that this does not suggest that writers before the scientific

revolution from the sixteenth century onward were unable to distinguish between the

fantastical and the realistic, but that it is the distinction between a fantastical and a

realist rendition that is at the heart of the fantasy story.[33] Throughout this study,

then, fantasy will be considered to be those narratives in which the impossible – and

the wonder produced by encountering the impossible – or rather, the perception of

the impossible is, as Clute puts it, '*their point*': '[standing] as a counter-statement to

a dominant world-view'.[34] Tolkien also highlights this characteristic of fantasy, from

a receptor-standpoint, in 'On Fairy-Stories', explaining that both fairy stories and

fantasy are predicated on the recognition, brought upon by the age of Reason and

Enlightenment, of what is real and what is objectively impossible:

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[32] Clute, p. 338.
[33] Texts which include purposefully fantastic elements for the purposes of allegory or even satire prove difficult to classify, as a distinction between the fantastic and the perceived 'actual world' is evident. However, it is a matter of the application of those fantastic elements, wherein allegory employs the fantastic for the sake of commentary on the actual world, and fantasy employs the fantastic for the sake of creating the fantasy world.
[34] Clute, p. 338.

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make. […] For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it.[35]

Narratologically, then, that which is called fantasy is born out of eighteenth and nineteenth-century shifts in scientific and rational thought, purposefully violating what is considered 'reality' with the depiction of the 'impossible' for the purpose of telling stories about the fantastic and its landscape. At the same time, as Sandner further suggests, that which is referred to today as fantasy, or rather 'modern fantasy', 'only really becomes an on-going and organized inquiry in the late twentieth century'. [36] This is not to say that modern fantasy has only existed since the late twentieth century but, as stated above, it has been critically studied and been subject to attention, from critics, writers, and, most especially, readers in such a way that it is at this point, in the latter half of the twentieth century, that fantasy begins to be seen, not merely as a grouping of (collective) fantastic elements and active (independent) subversions of reality, but as what Brian Attebery refers to as a 'fuzzy set', as a demarcatable marketable genre and as an object, however tenuous, that can be examined as an entity. Thus, fantasy is both a genre comprised of impossible narratives about the fantastic that 'hasn't worked itself through' as well as a recognizable system that can be critically – and thus metafictionally – observed and analysed.

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[35] Tolkien, p. 144.
[36] Sandner, p. 289.

It is a genre that is perpetually pretending toward reality (possessing a real or invented history and a real or invented reality) and denouncing reality (revealing it, accusing it, and informing it) even as it denies reality (subverting it, inverting it, transforming it). Therein lies the apparent disparity in the genre, in that it signals to very real features, facts, and elements (correspondences between the subject(s) of a fantastic historic taproot and historic shifts in the mediation of knowledge, science, philosophy, and sociology) while simultaneously appearing to openly reject them. This apparent rejection, as Tolkien and others put it, is inherently predicated on the implication and acceptance of the first. Its function is to '[make] use of both the fantastic mode, to produce the impossibilities, and the mimetic, to reproduce the familiar', thereby creating wonder.[37] In describing the qualities, functions, and dynamics of the genre, critical scholarship of modern fantasy seems to have agreed upon the existence of an inherent duality in the genre: a simultaneous pretension at reality and a denial of reality, a timelessness and a youthful renewal, an emphasis on the impossible while affirming enlightened fact, all of which is contained in and bared through a self-reflectivity in its production. In describing it thus, critical scholarship has revealed, though not pinpointed, the truth of the genre's mode of operation: that it is intrinsically metafictive, necessarily baring its fictiveness through its challenges to reality.

The aim of this thesis is therefore two-fold: to address the structural literary nature of fantasy narratives and by extension the genre, and to identify and name the effects that this critical recognition of fantasy as a genre has had in the production of

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[37] Attebery, 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula', p. 309.

fantasy and fantasy-like narratives in contemporary fiction. It has been divided into four large main chapters with several subdivisions:

- Chapter One demonstrates that the modern genre of fantasy is inherently and intrinsically metafictive;

- Chapter Two proposes the adoption of the term 'metafantasy' to describe a meta-metafictive form that responds metafictively to the genre of fantasy and provides an example of this dynamic by examining parodies of fantasy;

- Chapter Three focuses solely on a practical analysis of three forms of metafantasy that demonstrates its existence and characteristics;

- Chapter Four examines the relationship between fantasy and metafantasy in order to determine whether the latter is the literary evolution of fantasy or an altogether separate form.

In order to achieve the first, Chapter One will employ a framework based on the metafiction theory posited by Robert Scholes and Patricia Waugh, among others, situating and comparatively analysing fantasy texts, critical fantasy scholarship, and the genre as a whole, within this framework. The chapter will be divided into three main sections: intertextuality, hypertextuality and reader response theory, and subversion. Once fantasy is shown to be a metafictive genre – a metatextually-operating organism of texts about the fantastic that induces self-awareness concerning reality, fiction, narrative devices, and the historic fantastic narrative taproot – it will be possible to identify metafantasy. This, in turn, is a product of twentieth-century hyper-self-aware and meta-metafictive trends, and it is currently

observed across a wide range of contemporary fantasy narratives.[38] Several critics have noted a change in the manner in which certain writers are reacting and responding to fantasy, identifying many of these reactions as metafictive.[39] Recent hyperawareness and hyper-metafictions in fantasy, then, must be differentiated from this natural metafictive dynamic in the genre, if an explanation for their origins and functions is to be determined.

Chapter Two will thus explore what I am terming 'metafantasy', a form of metafiction about fantasy, an already metafictive form. It will centre on the theoretical aspects of defining metafantasy, from analysing the semantic usage of the term in previous criticism, to identifying what would and are the characteristics of a meta-metafictive form. To this end, the works of British fantasist Neil Gaiman have been chosen to serve as primary sources for a practical study into what constitutes metafantasy and how it responds to fantasy as a genre. The final section of Chapter Two will contain a practical study of parodies of fantasy, particularly Gaiman's, that will illustrate the way in which these narratives are metafantastic. This will allow Chapter Three to be devoted entirely to the main practical study of this thesis, the critical framework of which will be discussed below in conjunction to an introduction to Neil Gaiman.

Finally, Chapter Four will focus on those metafantasies that, while responding critically or deconstructively against fantasy, stand in apparent opposition to the fundamental descriptors of the genre, spurring conflicts concerning their status as

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[38] It should be noted, of course, that hyper-self-awareness and meta-metafiction is not exclusive to the twentieth-century. Nonetheless, it is during this century that these forms increase and become particularly noticeable, generating more such texts than, perhaps, in previous centuries.
[39] See Neil Easterbrook's 'The Shamelessly Fictive: Mimesis and Metafantasy', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 18 (2012), pp. 193-211, discussed in Chapter Two.

fantasy. The main aim of the chapter will be to determine, using these more tenuous and challenging metafantasies, what is the actual relationship between the genre and this metafictive response. When new forms or trends arise, there is a tendency to claim or predict how they will affect the literary genre and whether it will evolutionarily transform it, irrevocably changing even its fundamentally acknowledged features. This question is highly pertinent to the study of fantasy precisely because it is such an indefinable 'fuzzy' genre, be it approached generically, modally, formally, or structurally. What constitutes fantasy and what does not, as discussed at the beginning of this introduction, is often at the very heart of fantasy literary criticism, therefore, the possible transformation, via hypermetafictive narratives, of the genre into something that could potentially be unrecognizable from what is currently considered fantasy, constitutes a significant critical shift.

In pursuit of determining how metafantasy relates, generically, to fantasy, modern genre theory will be applied, such as that proposed by Yury Tynyanov, Ireneusz Opacki, Alistair Fowler, and David Duff. 'Liminal' and problematic texts will also be analysed, pursuing the question of whether they are indeed fantasy texts, and how their inclusion, exclusion, or existence itself, modifies, influences, and transforms the functions and characteristics of the genre. The chapter, after applying evolutionary genre theory, will look at three forms of metafantasy texts: fantasy narratives that are told non-fantastically, non-fantasy narratives that are told fantastically, and narratives where the intention is to prevent the reader from determining whether anything fantastic has occurred while simultaneously suggesting such a reading through the use of metafantastic allusions, reference,

tropes, and structures that activate the fantasy-genre reader's sense of fantastic expectation.

The remainder of this introduction will clarify the additional usage of some terms, such as intertextuality, hypertextuality, and transtextuality, as well as offer the necessary background information on Neil Gaiman. Metafiction scholarship often utilises transtextuality models such as those posited by Gérard Genette and Julia Kristeva, among others, as examples of metafictive dynamics. While theories of metafiction will be addressed in full throughout Chapter One, some definition concerning the usage of intertextuality and its associated terms is warranted.

In 1974, Kristeva describes intertextuality as '[denoting a] transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another,' in other words, the placement of a text within another text.[40] Kristeva also points out that she prefers to use the term transposition instead of intertextuality because 'it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic'.[41] She highlights that in the intertextual conversion from one text into the new text that includes it, the transposition changes the function of the text, a change that is seen to occur between both fantasy and its taproots, and metafantasy and fantasy. 'Transposition' is then the ability of the 'signifying process' to pass from one sign-system to another, to exchange and permutate them, [...and] it implies the abandonment of a former sign-system', which applied to fiction can be translated as abandoning one narrative text, as well as 'the passage to a second [sign system] via an instinctual intermediary

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[40] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 59-60.
[41] Kristeva, p. 60.

common to the two systems, and the articulation of the new system with its new

representability'.[42]

Judith Still and Michael Worton explain further that Kristeva's concept of

intertextuality refers to the 'literal and effective presence in a text of another text',

although for Genette, the term 'intertextuality' is not encompassing or descriptive

enough to explain the concept.[43] He instead proposes the term transtextuality (or

textual transcendence), meaning 'everything, be it explicit or latent, that links one

text to others'.[44] In addition, it is necessary to emphasize that there are several

interpretations regarding Kristeva's term, its application, extent and function. This

has led to disagreements about the difference between 'influence' and

'intertextuality' as well as arguments regarding intent and interpretation. Here

'intertextuality' will not be used to refer to Genette's broader 'transtextuality', but to

specific metatextual (the relationship between a commentary and its object)

'Kristevan' allusions, following also Murgatroyd's 'intentionality'. Conversely,

'transtextuality' will be used as a broader umbrella-term that encompasses both

intertextual and hypertextual forms, so as to mean all forms of extra-textual

connections formed between a given pre-text and metafictive text.

On Neil Gaiman: An Ideal Case Study

Since the debut of *The Sandman* in 1989, Neil Gaiman has become a prominent

fantasy, horror, sf, children's literature, and comic book writer, as well as a key

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[42] Kristeva, p. 60.
[43] Michael Worton and Judith Still, eds., *Intertextuality: Theories and practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 22.
[44] Worton and Still, p. 22.

example of the evolutionary process these fantastic genres are currently undergoing. As with fantasy, Gaiman's work is difficult to define, and he has been called everything from a fantasy, comics and graphic novel, horror, science fiction, postmodern, weird, and new fiction weird writer, to a 'new wave fabulist'. This last he is named in the *Conjunctions: 39* issue titled *The New Wave Fabulists* along with other experimental and genre-bending writers like China Miéville. The term emphasises the resurgence, revitalization and/or reinvention of fabulation, a subject that will be addressed in Chapter One. In *Conjunctions 38*, the new wave fabulists are described as:

> [A] small group of innovative writers rooted in the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror [that] have been simultaneously exploring and erasing the boundaries of those genres by creating fiction of remarkable depth and power.[45]

Throughout his work, Gaiman has sought to create strange worlds and fantastic visions that nonetheless retain a firm grip on either specifically recognizable fantastic narratives or the feeling of familiarity with fantastic narratives, blurring the barriers between the illusory real and the tangible fantastic, and raising questions regarding the conventions and assumptions of both. At the same time, the main concern expressed through his fiction is the question of how humans, especially in Western culture, mediate their reality (as composed of their history and environmental influences, their everyday lives, and their consumption and production of fiction) through their fiction (the metafictive, self-aware consciousnesses that try to make sense of the world). In other words, Gaiman's

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[45] Bradford Morrow, Peter Constantine and William Weaver, eds., 'Preview', *Rejoicing Revoicing,* Conjunctions Series, 38 (New York: Bard College, 2002), p. 2.

fiction makes history, reality, and fiction (especially fantastic fiction) the subject of his fiction. For Gaiman, storytelling is the method by which the world is constructed; it is a cyclical self-enabling process where story describes the world by describing story because the world is constructed of story and the story is constructed of the world. The most fundamental building blocks of those stories are, for Gaiman, often found within the fantastic.

In his first mainstream breakthrough work, *The Sandman* (1989-1996), he took the eponymous DC superhero from the golden age of comics (1939) and re-imagined him as the dark, brooding and now-supernatural Morpheus or Dream (among his many names). Typically represented as the anthropomorphised personification of the act and state of dreaming, Morpheus is the prince of stories who believes he has no story, though metafictionally he does.[46] Through him, his six equally personified siblings, and the myriad of other personages from myth, legend, fantasy, comic books, science fiction, and real life, Gaiman challenges the conceptions of what is a fantasy story and, more broadly, the genre of fantasy.

This meshing of various mythos and fantastic storylines (as pastiches, parodies, retellings, and direct genre subversions) has long since become the staple of Gaiman's writing style. In *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch* written in 1990 with Terry Pratchett, a demon and an angel form an unlikely partnership in order to save the world from the scheduled

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[46] See Gaiman's *The Tempest*, The Sandman Series, 75 (New York: Vertigo, 1996), p. 36. The baring of the narrative's self-awareness of story is evident throughout the series, such as in the depictions of the Dreaming, in Lucifer's appearances, and the entirety of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *World's End*, and *Season of Mists* volumes of The Sandman series by Gaiman (issues 19, 51-56, and 21-28, respectively) .

Apocalypse because they have come to enjoy their respective lives on Earth.[47] The blend of Biblical imagery, religious beliefs, and a purposely extravagant and exaggerated plot reminiscent of Pratchett's *Discworld* novels, is constantly on the verge of overwhelming the reader, particularly because it draws their attention to the dynamic of reading and the realities of fiction. In his next novel, *Neverwhere* (1996), a mild-mannered businessman, Richard Mayhew, has his life thrown out of control when he is visited by a seemingly insane young girl named Door, who drags him to a world underneath London, where all manner of both familiar and unique fantastic creatures dwell such as the Rat Speakers and the wonder-haggling traders of the Floating Market.[48] The novel delights in fairytales and fables, commenting on the way these narratives are read and interpreted as well as on how so much of the fantastic is dependent on the protagonist's decision to accept it as fantastic. Gaiman continued to develop his fantasist and fabulist skills with *Stardust* (1999), a fantasy tale also following in the footsteps of classic fairytales from the Brothers Grimm's folktales and Rosetti's *Goblin Market*, to Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter* and Hope Mirlees' *Lud-in-the-Mist*.[49] In fact, *Stardust* is filled with so many references to both well-known and obscure fantasy narratives (intentionally pre-Tolkien), that each reader would be able to respond to it using different intertextual connections. His last two novels for adults, *American Gods* and its sequel *Anansi Boys*, continue to include and excel at this kind of allusion to the metanarrative of fantasy, blending worldwide mythologies while maintaining a level of self-awareness of the genre and the act of bringing these sources together that

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[47] Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman, *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch* (London: Gollancz, 1990).
[48] Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere* (London: BBC Books, 1996).
[49] Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess, *Stardust* (New York: Avon Books, 1999).

rightly reinforces what many critics have said regarding twentieth century, and subsequently twenty-first century, fiction: [50]

> Over the last twenty years, novelists have tended to become much more aware of the theoretical issues involved in constructing fictions. In consequence, their novels have tended to embody dimensions of self-reflexivity and formal uncertainty.[51]

To this range of long works are added three official short story collections, *Smoke and Mirrors* (1998), *Fragile Things* (2006), and *Trigger Warning* (2015), that contain stories many of which will be analysed throughout Chapters Two, Three and Four, and several books for young adults and children. These latter works will not be discussed at length in this thesis as, though metafantastic traces and qualities can be discerned in them, their metafantasies are not as pronounced as those of Gaiman's material for adult readers. This is not to say that children's and young adult narratives do not contain metafantastic characteristics, as indeed many do, but that Gaiman's work for younger readers is less overtly so, and therefore will not be used in order to limit the already large body of investigatory work.[52]

In short, Gaiman's fiction for adults, the larger part of his work, involves a constant building or scaffolding upon the fantastic and its pre-texts extensively combined with countless references and allusions to everything and anything else (stories, novels, fantastic worlds, myths, superstition, popular culture, television, and history)

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[50] Neil Gaiman, *American Gods* (New York: William Morrow, 2001); Neil Gaiman, *Anansi Boys* (New York: William Morrow, 2005).
[51] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 2.
[52] Some examples of children and young adult works that will be mentioned include texts from Diana Wynne Jones' oeuvre, Cornelia Funke's *Inheart* series, and Cathrynne M. Valente's *Fairyland* series, among others.

in order to create dialogues between fiction and reality. These, in turn, invite the reader to recognise the allusions being made and thereby acknowledge their own awareness of the expected barriers between fictional worlds and their consensus of 'reality'. Essentially, fantasy is the way to tell stories about the fantastic, but what new wave fabulists like Neil Gaiman and fantasists like Terry Pratchett and Diana Wynne Jones do is tell stories about fantasy – about the landscape of Fantasyland.

As mentioned earlier, Chapters Two, Three, and Four, which comprise the investigative bulk, will focus on what metafantasy is by employing Gaiman. The final section of Chapter Two will look at parody of fantasy, utilizing texts such as Gaiman and Pratchett's *Good Omens* and Pratchett's *Discworld* series as primary examples. The section will first establish the parameters for discussing parody and why it functions metafictionally in order to explore the metafictional differences between the knowing use of fantasy in humorous or satirical texts like Cabell's *Jurgen* and the knowing parodying of fantasy. Through the selected texts, the need for the reader's acknowledgement of a recognizable and perceivable genre of fantasy will be determined, demonstrating a metafictive genre-response as opposed to a fiction-response. Similarly, the first section of Chapter Three, which focuses on pastiches of fantasy, will look at Gaiman's Lovecraftian pastiches in order to examine the reader-text hypertextual and self-aware dynamics, not only with H.P. Lovecraft's famous Mythos, but with the pastiching tradition and the fan-culture responses to those pastiches. The level of conscious imitation enacted by Gaiman in these stories is recognized as a tripled response to a pastiched fantasy oeuvre. Applying Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon's theories on pastiche, in addition to some brief contextual applications of Baudrillardian concepts of simulation and

simulacra, this section will show how Gaiman's stories are reacting not merely with an awareness of fiction (and all the intentionally subversive implications that entails) but with an awareness of an already self-aware fiction, in this case, the Lovecraftian pastiching tradition and the metafictive Mythos itself.

Section two will look at Gaiman's fantasy and fairytale retellings, especially 'Snow, Glass, Apples', 'Troll Bridge', 'The White Road', and 'Nicholas Was…', though other stories will also be addressed. Gaiman's retellings, as with his myth-mixing narratives like *American Gods*, *Neverwhere*, and *The Sandman*, are particularly telling of the pervasive genre-awareness that twenty-first century fabulists and fantasy-readers possess. These narratives offer alternative readings of popular or 'classic' fantastic stories, readings which are predicated on knowledge of other fantastic genres (such as horror), on storytelling fantasy and fairytales (by making references to their archetypes and cultural longevity), and on a freedom awarded by the acknowledgement of fantasy's liberating narrative power. In this manner, Gaiman is free – and blatantly revels in the awareness of this fact – to entirely subvert (challenge, invert, analyse) the perceptions and expectations of popular fairytales, not using them as taproots with which to construct or build upon stories, as in Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword* or Hope Mirless' *Lud-in-the-Mist*, for instance, but using fantasy as a taproot with which to deconstruct its own taproots in turn.

Chapter Three will then conclude by discussing Gaiman's genre-aware characters, namely those characters who through their actions, thoughts, and/or words exhibit an awareness of fantasy as a genre – as a form of fiction to which they have access.

These characters might perceive fantasy as an everyday common occurrence, not just by being fantastic themselves or through having had prolonged exposure to it, but because they either perceive a metafictive quality of storicity (as, for example, when Granny Weatherwax is able to perceive 'narrative causality' in Pratchett's *Discworld*) or because they have been exposed to enough fantasy texts to possess genre-savviness.[53] As is apparent, these four sections utilize very blatant forms of metafiction to deconstruct the expected features of the genre of fantasy, which is why they are ideal for identifying metafantasy.

To summarise, this thesis proposes that fantasy is an intrinsically metafictive genre; that a new form, called metafantasy, has arisen that reacts metafictionally to this already metafictive genre by reflecting the concerns of a highly self-conscious literarily-minded culture; and that a recognition of the differences in function between these two forms accounts for the anomalies and the defamiliarizing impetus experienced by critics, writers, and readers alike, be they steeped in fantasy knowledge or not. The focus on one author is one of methodological convenience, though Neil Gaiman is prime candidate as a case study due to his acknowledged self-consciousness, comprehensive genre knowledge, and contemporary positioning. In one of his essays, he reiterates that 'without our stories we are incomplete' because myths, fantasy, and imaginative literature 'make sense of the world we inhabit'; their function is to 'show us the world we know, but from a different direction', which is why 'the act of inspecting them is important'.[54]

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[53] Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), p. 13.
[54] Neil Gaiman, 'Reflections on Myth', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 31 (1999), 75-84 (pp. 76, 78, 80).

Gaiman is fond of the phrase 'the tale is the map which is the territory', based on the idea that maps describe territories, but they do so – ultimately and inevitably – inadequately because the most accurate map would need to be the size of the territory itself, rendering it utterly useless.[55] In other words, a map can only approximate the territory, but it is the most useful way of describing and defining the territory. The territory of fantasy, sometimes called Fantasyland, sometimes Faërie, and sometimes, critically, the fantasy metatext, is vast and, as seen, largely indefinable, but as Gaiman says, a story is best described in the telling; Fantasyland, in being comprised of stories is best described by those very stories from, with, and about Fantasyland (the metatext). In doing so, the stories become the very thing they describe – they are at once map and territory, for though the territory is infinitely vast, it only exists when told. This investigative work thus analyses the tale, using it as a map through which to explore the territory of the modern genre of fantasy. The aim is not to define it because it is already defined by each narrative expansion. Instead, this thesis seeks to propose a new lens by which to view the landscape of fantasy, one that accounts for the genre's apparent self-examination and metafictive baring of its territory; the tale will be the guiding map through the land of Story and Fantasy, demonstrating that the genre of fantasy has always been and continues to be, the tool of its own critical deconstruction and renewal. 'These stories have power', 'you must remember this'.[56]

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[55] See also *American Gods*, p. 545, and 'The Mapmaker', *Fragile Things*, by Neil Gaiman (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), pp. xix-xxii.

[56] Gaiman, 'Reflections', p. 84; 'The Mapmaker', p. xx.

Chapter 1: Metafiction and Fantasy

Section 1: Metafiction

This chapter will focus on metafiction, its functions and characteristics, in order to establish a parallel to the genre of modern fantasy that will demonstrate fantasy's inherent metafictionality. Throughout, this chapter will utilize theories of transtextuality, author intent and reader response as developed by Gérard Genette, Julia Kristeva and Louise Rosenblatt, and apply them to the critical scholarship undertaken within the genre of fantasy, particularly those related to its structures, objectives, and operating subversiveness.

What is Metafiction?

Metafiction, as mentioned in the introduction, is a term used for writing that simultaneously 'explores the *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction'. Originating from one of William H. Gass' essays in 1960, it has since been recognized as a product symptomatic of, as Patricia Waugh puts it, a 'more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world'.[1] Though it was only in 1960 that the form was identified, no doubt as a result of the rapid growth and expansion of schools of thought such as postmodernism, its dynamics and, more importantly, its function (purpose), have always been a recursive part of the narrative form. In his book on *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979), Robert Scholes illustrates this by retelling a 1484 story that behaves metafictionally. Although Scholes' reason for the inclusion

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[1] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 2.

of the story is to point out the use of the term 'fabulation', the story also shows, not only the ancient tradition of creating self-revealing fictions, but also the multilayered capability of metafiction, the manner in which a story is able to breach those layers (subversion), and the connections between author, text and reader (transtextuality):

A disciple was sometime, which took his pleasure to rehearse and tell many fables; the which prayed to his master that he would rehearse unto him a long fable. To whom the master answered, "Keep and beware well that it hap not to us as it happened to a King and his fabulator." And the disciple answered, "My master, I pray thee to tell to me how it befell." And then the master said to his disciple:

"Sometime was a King which had a fabulator, the which rehearsed to him at every time that he would sleep five fables for to rejoice the King and for to make him fall into a sleep. It befell then on a day that the King was much sorrowful and so heavy that he could in no wise fall asleep. And after that the said fabulator had told and rehearsed his five fables the King desired to hear more. And then the said fabulator recited unto him three fables well short. And the King then said to him, 'I would fain hear one well long, and then shall I sleep.' The fabulator then rehearsed unto him such a fable, of a rich man which went to the market or fair to buy sheep, the which man brought a thousand sheep. And as he was returning from the fair he came unto a river and because of the great waves of the water he could not pass over the bridge. Nevertheless, he went so long to and fro on the rivage [bank] of the said river that at last he found a narrow way upon the which might pass scant enough three sheep at once. And thus he passed and had them over one after another. And hitherto rehearsed of this fable the fabulator fell asleep. And anon after the King awoke the fabulator and said to him in this manner, 'I pray thee that thou wilt make an end of thy fable.' And the fabulator answered to him in this manner: 'Sire, this river is right great, and the ship is little; wherefore, late the merchant do pass over his sheep. And after I shall

make an end of my fable.' And then was the King well appeased and pacified.

"And therefore be thou content of that I have rehearsed unto thee, for there is folk superstitious or capacious that they may not be contented with few words."[2]

In this story there are three levels of 'Story' or 'tale', the framing narrative of the master and his disciple (which is the primary story the reader is interacting with), the second tale containing the master's story to his disciple (of a king and his fabulator), and the third story told by the fabulator (of the rich man and his sheep crossing the river). Some of the stories are open-ended and some are closed or 'framed', but each is a separate level of Story or 'reality' nonetheless connected by a thread. The concept of Story is an important one to the metafiction/fantasy argument because both necessitate the acknowledgement of the framing story (the illusion of self-contained integrity of story) and of the breaking of it. By employing inner narratives about storytelling, the framing story is broken – it is made apparent that it is a story with author and reader (creator and listener). 'Story' as defined by John Clute in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* is 'any narrative which tells or implies a sequence of events, in any order which can be followed by hearers or readers, and which generates a sense that its meaning is conveyed through the actual telling'.[3] However, it also suggests a grander concept: a collective for storytelling narratives.[4] Here, 'three levels of Story' implies three narrative levels that convey three different

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[2] Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1979), pp. 1-2. Bracket insertion is Scholes'.

[3] John Clute, 'Story', in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), pp. 899-901.

[4] Clute expands that 'fantasy texts are most easily understood as the telling of Story in this sense; [...they] can be characterized as always moving toward the unveiling of an irreducible substratum of Story, an essence sometimes obscure but ultimately omnipresent[…]' This application to fantasy will be looked at briefly in the 'Subversion' section of this chapter, and it will be most invaluable in the study of metafantasy, its form, patterns and characteristics.

senses of meaning through the telling, and which affect and reflect meaning back up through the levels.

In addition to possessing three levels of reality (a story within a story within a story), the narrative also makes a statement regarding stories, and what people expect of them. It speaks metafictionally because it goes 'beyond' the confines of the fiction and alludes to Story. The disciple wanted to make a long story so his master tells him a story about long stories in order to comment and advise about the inadvisability of telling long stories. The reader, on their part, is aware that everything is already contained within a story. The tale, while arguably simpler than the metafiction produced in the twentieth century, still exemplifies the characteristics of the style: 'a celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with an uncertainty about the validity of its representations; an extreme self-consciousness about language, literary form and the act of writing fictions; a pervasive insecurity about the relationship of fiction to reality; a parodic, playful, excessive or deceptively naïve style of writing'.[5]

It is useful to explore these aspects with a relatively simple story because it will make the comparison and contrast with fantasy and what it does, less complex. That said, a contemporary story, such as the often quoted 'The Circular Ruins' by Jorge Luis Borges, which toes the line of what is regarded as 'fantasy' from a genre standpoint, is closer to illustrating the relationship between metafiction, story and fantasy from a, nonetheless, non-fantasy perspective. In the story, Borges tells of a man walking through the jungles, reflecting on what it would be like to 'dream up a

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[5] Waugh, p. 2.

man': 'The purpose which guided him was not impossible, though supernatural. He wanted to dream a man; he wanted to dream him in minute entirety and impose him on reality'.[6] The metatextual parallel between the fictional character and the real author (and writers in general) is immediately apparent.

Like a writer who wishes to create a character, Borges' character wishes to dream a man into being – to create a man who would be entirely conscious and autonomous. As he goes on his quest to think of all the intricacies which make up the human mind and consciousness, he himself is forced to ponder the meanings of consciousness and the mind: 'He understood that modeling the incoherent and vertiginous matter of which dreams are composed was the most difficult task that a man could undertake, even though he should penetrate all the enigmas of a superior and inferior order'.[7] Finally, when he dreams up his man whom he calls a son and whom he can only view in his own mind, he sets out to teach the Dream-Man, even though he is aware of the man's true nature. Borges' character even fears, in his contemplations of awareness, what it would mean for his Dream-Man to become self-conscious; that is, not only conscious of being a man, but conscious of being another man's dream:

> He feared lest his son should meditate on this abnormal privilege and by some means find out he was a mere simulacrum. Not to be a man, to be a projection of another man's dreams--what an incomparable humiliation, what madness![8]

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[6] Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Circular Ruins', in *Ficciones*, ed. and trans. by Anthony Kerrigan (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), pp. 39-44 (p. 40).
[7] Borges, p. 41.
[8] Borges, p. 44.

To his utmost horror the creator realizes, at the very end of the story and as the world collapses around him, that he himself 'was an illusion, that someone else was dreaming him', – an implication that can mean another unseen fictional character or, more knowingly and metafictionally, both author and reader.[9]

Borges' tale, similar to the ancient tale before, is 'a celebration of the power of the creative imagination [as well as] an uncertainty about the validity of its representation', as Waugh expressed it her book *Metafiction*. In both stories, the act of imagining and creating (a man or another story) is the focus; both celebrate the imaginative process while questioning it at the same time, creating and deconstructing simultaneously. In addition, the 'self-consciousness about language, literary form and […] writing […]' particular to metafictive writing is also present in both stories, such as when the master tells his disciple to 'keep and beware well' of long stories so that they [the master and disciple] do not suffer the fate of the king and his fabulator, or when the dreamer/dream in Borges' story sits down to think about and describe the philosophies and other aspects of dreaming and creation.

At the same time, while these examples provide an overview of metafiction's characteristics, there remains a vagueness in terms such as 'awareness' and 'self-consciousness' as well as in limiting how these breaches in narrative levels are evaluated that must be established more in depth if fantasy is to be successfully compared with and subsequently labelled, metafiction.

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[9] Borges, p. 44.

Problems with Defining Metafiction:

I - Self-Consciousness

As broached in the introduction, the operating definition of metafiction is that set forth and employed by Patricia Waugh in *Metafiction*, whereby it is to be regarded as:

> [A] term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.[10]

While Waugh's definition certainly appears to be a more accurate description of metafiction's characteristics, a brief look at Scholes' earlier definitions reveals the disparity within the field. To begin with, he classes metafiction as a form of contemporary experimental fiction born more out of criticism than as a form of fiction which has always existed. He argues that 'metafiction assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself [… emphasizing the] structural, formal, behavioral or philosophical qualities of fiction'.[11]

Scholes argues that metafiction straddles some form of border between fiction and its criticism while Waugh's definition, and other subsequent definitions, rightly broaden this notion. According to her, metafiction is capable of using all of the

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[10] Waugh, p. 2.
[11] Scholes, p. 114.

perspectives and elements of fiction, be it its criticism, its pre-texts, the reader's response to it and to those previous texts, and literary theory itself in order to express awareness of the form.[12] It is in this manner that the definition of metafiction comes nearest to the etymology of the term itself in that it breaks 'beyond' the fiction to everything 'outside' that is in any way related to fiction, including reality itself. It is this in particular, in addition to its other descriptors, that first hints at the connection between metafiction and fantasy.

Nevertheless, the problem that stems from Waugh's definition is the use of the term 'self-conscious'. Self-consciousness is an acknowledged characteristic of sentient beings, and as such cannot be applied to inanimate objects which possess neither mind or consciousness. On the other hand, narratives, by virtue of being comprised of coherent and intentionally selected words, reflect a conscious and aware mind through language (the mode through which conscious beings communicate). In this manner, texts can be said to possess a form of consciousness or rather, create an illusion of thought and reasoning.[13] Under these parameters then, self-conscious literature can be identified as that literature which, by appearing to be self-conscious, gives the illusion of an awareness of self, an awareness of its condition as a piece of literature, or as a narrative form.

This creates a new problem in the definition, for to be 'self-conscious', or 'aware of oneself', implies being aware not only of one's condition but of one's condition of

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[12] 'Literary theory' is here used as a general overarching concept suggesting any and all analyses and forms of analyses on and about literature that, however accurate, authors and readers might possess and that enables them to perform this deconstructive (and metafictive) act.
[13] This ability of fiction to create illusions that make the impossible (here, consciousness from the inanimate) possible has significant repercussions when recognized in the fantasy/metafantasy argument, as will be seen.

awareness. In other words, a piece of self-conscious narration would not only have to be aware of the fact that it is a narrative, but of the fact that it is a self-conscious narrative. Naturally, this cyclicality has the potential to become logically infinite and ultimately useless.[14] Parameters must be set when discussing what a self-conscious narrative is, particularly to avoid confusion when discussing the difference between fantasy's metafictiveness and metafantasy. If metafiction is literature which creates fiction while using either literary theory, or drawing attention to the components, structures and elements of fiction, it means that in order for a fiction to be classed as metafictional, or at least to necessitate the acknowledgement that some form of metafiction is being used, it only needs to demonstrate it is drawing attention to the artifice of the fiction. In other words, it does not need to reflect an awareness of 'self' as much as an awareness of 'fiction'. Because the metafiction is still primarily 'a fiction', it can thus appear to be reflecting itself, when in truth it is merely utilising the components of fiction, calling attention to them, and constructing a fiction with them.

In this sense 'The Circular Ruins' is metafictional not because it gives the illusion of awareness of its own status as a fiction, but because its subject is the border of dreams and reality, which points to the borders of fiction and reality. It then breaks this frame when the narrator himself is revealed to be nothing but a dream; a fiction. In essence, it makes the reader aware of the artifice.

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[14] See Mark Currie's editor's introduction to *Metafiction* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1995), p. 1.

II - Limiting Metafiction

The next problem that arises from Waugh's definition, which she herself addresses in the book, is the fact that, once fiction's capacity for self-consciousness and subversion of reality is established, it is inevitable to arrive at the conclusion that all fiction is intrinsically metafictive. This perspective would render the issue of fantasy's metafictiveness moot. In addressing this problem, Waugh explains that:

> Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. The two processes are held together in a formal tension which breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction'.[15]

It is important to note two details from this explanation; the first is the notion that metafiction is constructed on the principle of opposition so that it is capable of simultaneously holding two contradictions within itself – the sustained illusion of its construction and the acknowledgement of it. This will be one of the key points of comparison between metafiction and the genre of fantasy. The second and more problematic detail is that all fiction, to some degree or another, engages in this opposition. Largely thanks to transtextuality, all fiction is inevitably tied to external texts (sources/precursors), be it other fictions or non-fictional non-literary forms of input that contain narratives or narrative processes. As such, it is almost impossible for a piece of fiction not to make some sort of 'statement about the creation of

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[15] Waugh, p. 6.

fiction' given that it will do this naturally through the very process of creating a narrative. Moreover, the fact that a fiction text can be identified as such implies an agreement between author-text-reader as to the status of the created work. This means that, as Waugh proposes in her book, 'metafiction is a tendency or function inherent in *all* novels'.[16]

However, a definition that is so broad as to encompass all fiction is impractical and unwieldy. Though it makes arguing the case for any form of fiction being metafictional easier, it also undermines its significance. If fantasy's metafictiveness is to be a means of accounting for the genre's fuzzy structures and parameters, then a demarcation between fiction and metafiction (and thus between fantasy and fiction on a critical level) must be devised. It is curious to note, however, how fantasy faces similar difficulties in pinning down definitive terms and characteristics, garnering descriptors such as 'fuzzy' or such statements as 'fairyland cannot be pinned down' in its scholarship. As addressed in the introduction, the one characteristic that critics and writers consistently identify as defining of fantasy, it is its defying definition. Neither metafiction nor fantasy operates in one single, unique and unrelated manner.

While there are narratives which can be instantly called metafictional, just as there are quintessential fantasies, scholars of metafiction like Waugh, and even Scholes, recognise that there is a sliding scale across which texts can be more metafictional than others and where they achieve their metafictionality through different methods.[17] The same is applicable to fantasy, where distinctions and classifications like those in Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, or differences in mode and form

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[16] Waugh, p. 5.

[17] Brian Attebery, 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula', *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Sandner (London: Praeger, 2004) pp. 293-309 (pp. 305-306).

such as Attebery identifies in 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula' can be made. In order to understand metafiction and compare it appropriately to fantasy, it is therefore necessary to separate these various methods of operation and explore each individually.

Although a comparative study of forms of fiction and genres need not and should not be solely a structuralist one, the application of some structuralist methods is useful in determining what 'something is' and what 'something isn't'. The need for a narrower definition is evident, specifically one that focuses strictly on fiction that subverts reality more directly and blatantly than the traditional novel, which can then be used as basis of comparison with fantasy. When Waugh talks about the 'language of fiction' whose use makes the narrative appear self-conscious, she acknowledges that all fiction is capable of it, but that metafiction 'makes this potential explicit'. It denotes intent from the author to the text, and it implies a need for acknowledgement from the part of the reader of that which is supposedly 'explicit'. To this it can be added that a metafictive work needs to be approached with a certain level of awareness of its device-baring intentions, otherwise the narrative risks being rendered meaningless.

In essence then, metafiction must be limited, for the purposes of manageable discussion, to literature which possesses the appearance of self-consciousness of the elements of literature and its narrative structures, if not of its own status as a self-conscious narrative (although it is not discounted that such metafiction can also be produced). In addition, it is restricted, to a degree, to those narratives whose purpose is to sustain structural and even functional opposition within themselves, a set of

contradictions regarding what they are: a fiction and a fiction that acknowledges it is a fiction (or that acknowledges the concept of fiction, its components, and its dynamics). The element of explicit intent, and therefore the need for an acknowledgement of that intent in order to construct meaning, becomes its defining characteristic.

Intent is a particularly difficult concept to establish. When discussing intertextuality, critics like Paul Murgatroyd put particular importance on the notion of intent, which he describes as that which gives 'clear and substantial indications' of the author's intent for the text.[18] Intent might therefore be limited to only that which is clear and unmistakable by being demonstrably necessary in interpreting meaning. For instance, when H. Rider Haggard, writing in the first person from the perspective of Allan Quatermain, uses the framing narrative of someone telling their adventure story, it could be said that there is a clear and substantial implication of '[drawing] attention to its status as an artefact', that is, to its fictionality, by being from the point of view of an adventurer telling the story of their adventure:

> It is a curious thing that at my age—fifty-five last birthday—I should find myself taking up a pen to try to write a history. I wonder what sort of a history it will be when I have finished it, if ever I come to the end of the trip![19]

Or, to reference Borges' stories again, specifically 'The Other', when the character of Jorge Luis Borges sits on a bench with his younger self and wonders which one of them is imagining the other, it could be said that there is an implicit intent to 'pose

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[18] Paul Murgatroyd, *Mythical and Legendary Narrative in Ovid's Fasti* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 99.
[19] H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 7. [Note that such framing structures are often called metafictive devices.]

questions about the relationship between fiction and reality'.[20] Similarly, Italo Calvino's intent to simultaneously make a story-shaped world and break its reality is apparent when he writes:

> You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. [...] Tell the others right away, "No, I don't want to watch TV!" Raise your voice [...] "I'm reading! I don't want to be disturbed!" [...] "I'm beginning to read Italo Calvino's new novel!"[21]

That said, intent is not always 'clear' as writers can and often do include subtler references, allusions and structures that may not be immediately obvious to readers. Likewise, poststructuralists argue, readers are capable of devising their own references and picking out details that were not intended by the author. These responses are not invalid, nor do they negate the impact of the author's intent. The limits to intent then can be placed in two parts: in one, it is limited to what can be determined to be intentional from the author, and in the other to what can be interpreted and received by the reader. More importantly, both need to coincide when it comes to the appearance of self-consciousness and the acknowledgment of 'the fiction' (or 'the fantasy').

Fabulation and Metafiction: Toward Fantasy

In addition to issues of technicalities in definition and parameters, another complication in the discussion of metafiction is that is it often associated, equalled

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[20] Waugh, p. 2.
[21] Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveller*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1982), p. 9.

and contrasted to the term 'fabulation'. The fact that there exists such a term as fabulation, and that it is generally paired with metafiction, is one of the first indicators of a connection between metafiction and fantasy. While the *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* does not contain an entry for 'metafiction', it does have one on 'fabulation', which it describes, in relation to fantasy, as a fantasy 'which significantly undermines the felt reality of the world it depicts [such that it] will be responded to by most readers as aberrant'.[22] Of course, as discussed in the introduction, the term 'fantasy' alone is a divisive one, even within the genre discussion. Here, Clute's description of fabulation depicts it as something that not only subverts or undermines the reality of the 'actual world' but that of the expected realities of fantasy.

The term 'fabulation' was revived by Robert Scholes who also led the popularisation of the term metafiction first in his book *The Fabulators* (1967) and later with the revision of that earlier work in *Fabulation and Metafiction*. His definitions and explanations regarding metafiction have already been discussed briefly, although his focus was always more toward fabulation than the meta style. Nonetheless, the two terms have often been used interchangeably in the past near-fifty years. That said, it is clear that at least Scholes makes a clear distinction between the two, which must be acknowledged in order to determine whether fantasy is more like metafiction or fabulation. This is particularly important given the fact that many recent writers of the past twenty years whose work has been generally labelled (often for marketable

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[22] Clute, 'Fabulation', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, pp. 327-328.

reasons) as 'fantasy', have also been referred to as 'new wave fabulists' (often for marketable reasons).[23]

In his book, Scholes begins by listing the characteristics of fabulation which include the idea that 'it reveals an extraordinary delight in design,' that its 'shape is partly to be admired for its own sake', and that it seeks a 'sense of pleasure in form'.[24] In other words, Scholes describes fabulation as a narrative form which 'puts the highest premium on art and joy' while '[asserting] the authority of the shaper, the fabulator behind the fable, i.e. on revealing it's a creation by revealing it has an author'.[25] For him, fabulation encompasses that type of playful style in fiction and suggests questions regarding the relationship between fabulation and reality. In addition, he considers metafiction as a kind of experimental fabulation instead of a style completely divorced from fabulation.

Despite the attempts at distinguishing between these genres and styles, the fact remains that when their respective definitions are contrasted and analysed, the contrast reveals that critics and writers are, for the most part, describing different aspects of the same subject. In many ways the parable of the blind men and the elephant applies constantly to this study in that the definitions, descriptors and characteristics applied and identified in fantasy are comparable to those used for studies of metafiction and fabulation. Consider Scholes' definitive description of fabulation:

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[23] Attebery's 'fantasy as genre' arguments are applicable to this discussion. See introduction.
[24] Scholes, p. 2.
[25] Scholes, pp. 3, 2.

It is my contention that modern fabulation grows out of an attitude which may be called "fallibilism," just as nineteenth-century realism grew out of an earlier attitude called positivism. Fabulation, then, means not a turning away from reality, but an attempt to find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality. Modern fabulation accepts, even emphasizes, its fallibilism, its inability to reach all the way to the real, but it continues to look toward reality. It aims at telling such truths as fiction may legitimately tell in ways which are appropriately fictional.[26]

Scholes refers to Charles Sanders Peirce's 'fallibilism' in order to explain the acceptance of the fabulist writer (and surely ultimately the fabulist reader) of the fact that 'we cannot in any way reach perfect certitude nor exactitude' with regards to reality, although simultaneously they must attempt to find this connection between fiction and reality, despite the inability to successfully achieve it.[27] He adds that it is by invention that 'we may open a way toward reality that will come as close to it as human ingenuity may come'.[28]

If fabulation seeks to find truth and reality in fiction through the creation of fictional reality, then it can be assumed that it needs to make use, to some degree at least, of literary theory and even philosophy. The acknowledgement of fiction in reality and vice versa, as well as of the need to understand and explore the 'relationship between words and the world' through the fiction, denotes an awareness of fiction's components.[29] The need for a 'metalanguage', as well as the implication of a metanarrative, is then required in order to reach Scholes' fabulation. Using Borges as an example, Scholes explores the manner in which Borges' fictions 'move

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[26] Scholes, p. 8.
[27] Scholes, referencing Charles Saunders Peirce's 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear' (pp. 23-41), and 'The Scientific Attitude and Fallibilism' (pp. 42-59), in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. by Justus Buchler (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1940), in *Fabulation and Metafiction*, p. 8.
[28] Scholes, p. 13.
[29] Scholes, p. 9.

language *toward* reality', stating that 'artful writing offers a key that can open the doors of the prison-house of language'.[30]

Similarly, Waugh uses language theory as a comparative example to metafiction, asserting in her chapter on 'What is metafiction?' that the relationship between the phenomenal world and language is much more complex than the simple belief that 'language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and "objective" world'.[31] Instead, because of its complexity, 'meta' terms are needed in order to 'explore [the] arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers'.[32] Similarly, metafiction is needed to explore the relationship between the world of fiction and the world outside the fiction. Scholes' argument of fabulation being a fiction which seeks to move toward reality by escaping the confines of fiction and language only to create fiction is strikingly similar to Waugh's description of metafiction's exploration of the relationship between reality and fiction.

However, in her book Waugh protests that fabulation and metafiction are not the same concept at all. She says that:

> As novel readers, we look to fiction to offer us cognitive functions, to locate us within everyday as well as within philosophical paradigms, to explain the historical world as well as offer some formal comfort and certainty. Scholes argues that the empirical has lost all validity and that a collusion between the philosophic and the mythic in the form of 'ethically controlled fantasy' is the only authentic mode for fiction (Scholes 1967, p 11). However, metafiction offers the recognition, not that the everyday has ceased to matter, but that its

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[30] Scholes, p. 10. It is curious to note that Borges' works (and sometimes the same work) are often cited as supporting examples of both fabulation and metafiction.
[31] Scholes, p. 3.
[32] Waugh, p. 3.

formulation through social and cultural codes brings it closer to the philosophical and mythic than was once assumed.[33]

Waugh consigns fabulation to 'a celebration of the creative imagination', which is certainly partly what Scholes describes it as, although this description is not limited to art and joy, but complemented and reinforced by fabulation's attempt to find those correspondences between reality in fiction and fiction in reality.[34] Waugh emphasises that metafiction 'explicitly lays bare the conventions of realism [... and...] does not abandon "the real world" for the narcissistic pleasures of the imagination', yet this notion sounds incongruent when compared to her own examples of metafictional narratives.[35] Borges' 'The Circular Ruins', 'The Other', and many of his other stories in *Ficciones* (1944) or *Labyrinths* (1962), surely promote a celebration of creative imagination through the act of creation. If metafiction, as Waugh states, sets up an 'opposition, not to [...] "objective" facts in the "real" world, but to the language of the realistic novel which has sustained and endorsed such a view of reality', then fabulation is doubtless the same concept, or at least one of its forms.[36]

Waugh concedes as much by the end of her chapter, proposing that metafiction is:

> [an] elastic term which covers a wide range of fictions. There are those
> novels at one end of the spectrum which take fictionality as a theme to be
> explored (and in this sense would include the self-begetting novel') [...]. At
> the centre of this spectrum are those texts that manifest the symptoms of
> formal and ontological insecurity but allow their deconstructions to be finally

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[33] Waugh, p. 16.
[34] Waugh, p. 17.
[35] Waugh, p. 18.
[36] Waugh, p. 11.

recontextualized or 'naturalized' and given a total interpretation (which
constitute, therefore, a 'new realism') [...]. Finally, at the furthest extreme
(which would include 'fabulation') can be placed those fictions that, in
rejecting realism more thoroughly, posit the world as a fabrication of
competing semiotic systems which never correspond to material
conditions.[37]

Similarly, if conversely, Scholes places metafiction as an experimental fiction within

fabulation. In short, despite the differences in conclusions, Scholes' and Waugh's

arguments agree that while metafiction and fabulation are not the exact same thing,

they are dependent on and subject to one another. Their similarities are, for the

moment, enough to enable them to be regarded together in the fantasy argument.

Fabulation and Fantasy

Scholes posits that modern fabulation takes place via the 'ethically controlled

fantasy', while Clute calls fabulation an aberration or disparity within the reality of

the fantasy.[38] The manner in which Clute relates fabulation to fantasy implies it is

distinct from metafiction, although still slightly related to it, much in the same way

that that there is a connection between fabulation and metafiction. Clute states that

'the literatures of the fantastic positively glory in the fact that they present, and

embody, Story-shaped worlds', which if anything else, is indicative of fantasy's

subversiveness against reality and the idea of story pointing out that it is a story,

which is a quality almost natural to all fantasies.[39] Calling attention to its own

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[37] Waugh, pp. 18-19. A similar concession will be addressed in the chapters on metafantasy, as what
that is, cannot so much be condensed into one single mode of production, but instead shows the
plasticity of the self-aware spectrum and how it is manifested through literature.
[38] Scholes, p. 3.
[39] Clute, 'Recognition', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, pp. 804-805.

fictionality by way to the Story-shaped world might be described as aberrant in itself, yet what Clute specifically names 'fabulation' is fantasy narratives that subvert fantasy's reality. In the online *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* the definition for fabulation as applied to science fiction can actually be applied to fantasy as well and it reveals the fantasy-metafiction-fabulation connection:

> [A] *fabulation is any story which challenges the two main assumptions of genre sf: that the world can be seen; and that it can be told.* We have chosen to use the term 'fabulation' because it seems to us the best blanket description of the techniques employed by those writers who use sf devices to underline that double challenge, and whose work is thus at heart profoundly antipathetic to genre sf. A typical fabulation, then, is a tale whose telling is *foregrounded* in a way which emphasizes the inherent arbitrariness of the words we use, the stories we tell (Magic Realism, for instance, can be seen as a subversion of the 'official' stories which are told by 'rational' means and authorities), the characters whose true nature we can never plumb, the worlds we can never step into.[40]

If in science fiction fabulation is that technique which uses sf devices in a 'double challenge', creating an argument about sf itself as it constructs it, then fabulation applied to fantasy is that writing which uses fantasy devices (tropes, concepts, constructs, characters, themes, and/or settings) in order to tell the story. This chapter works to establish the argument that fantasy is inherently metafictional, but fabulation reveals another type of fantasy altogether. Fabulation, if regarded as a fiction that rejects the realism of an established form – in this case fantasy – is then closer to metafantasy, which in some iterations, outright rejects the established rules of fantasy in favour of commenting on the genre. Fabulatory fantasy, then, enters yet

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[40] Clute, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* 3rd edition, (SFE Ltd., 2012), <http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/copyright> [accessed 21 August 2012].

another level of subversion whereby it deconstructs fantasy as it creates its fiction. However, this will be explored later, once fantasy's 'metaness' is established.

Section 2: Metafiction and Fantasy

In his introduction, Mark Currie argues that some narratives are more metafictive while others employ 'marginal cases' of metafiction such as intertextuality.[41] The following sections will demonstrate how, be it through transtextual relationships embedded in the very structure of the genre, prompted to the reader or, most significantly, through the genre's necessary subversive doubling, fantasy repeatedly engages in all aspects of metafiction.

Metafiction, Transtextuality and Fantasy

Both metafiction and fantasy are regularly approached via studies of interpretation, influence and intertextuality. Metafiction, as seen, plays with the different levels of reality and fiction within a narrative so that it becomes capable of deconstructing and reconstructing narrative structure by making the reader aware of its own narrative elements or simply of the existence of narrative elements within a given text. Referencing outside texts and narratives engages with these varying levels because they force the reader to recognize the existence of realities/fictions outside of the text and extratextual recursiveness. These intertextual connections illustrate the range and scope of metafiction, blatantly situating texts within a metatext. Despite his marginalization of intertextuality, Currie concedes that metafiction's

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[41] Currie, 'Introduction', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie, pp. 1-18 (p. 4).

self-consciousness is often derived from a dependence upon intertextuality, i.e.,

'narratives which signify their artificiality by obtrusive references to traditional

forms or borrow their thematic and structural principles from other narratives'.[42]

This borrowing of thematic and structural principles and references to traditional

forms might be said to be, as Waugh has mentioned about metafiction, 'inherent to

all fictions', but differences in intent and that which is necessary in reader response

can establish boundaries between what is circumstantially intertextual and what is

metafictionally intertextual'.[43] Expounding, Currie offers the following examples

and explanation:

> In its reference to quest narratives, to Dante's 'Inferno' or to Coleridge's
> 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner', *Heart of Darkness* gives its literal journey
> symbolic and literary overtones. Joyce's *Ulysses* joins its portrait of Dublin
> inseparably to its reinterpretation of Homer. Coover's 'The Magic Poker'
> and Fowles's *The Magus* invoke the metaphors of Shakespeare's *The*
> *Tempest*. In each case an internal boundary between extratextual reference to
> real life and intertextual reference to other literature signifies the artificiality
> of the fictional world while simultaneously offering its realistic referential
> possibilities. The boundary of art and life within the fiction, by reproducing
> the boundary of art and life which surrounds the fiction, subverts its own
> referential illusion and in so doing places it on the boundary between fiction
> and criticism.[44]

In fantasy, the boundary of falsehood and truth within fiction (its inner realism) is

subverted by its calling of attention to its fictionality by means of its present

intertext, but also by its impossible plausibility. In employing this double awareness,

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[42] Currie, p. 4.
[43] Waugh, p. 5.
[44] Currie, pp. 4-5.

its acknowledged impossibility signals to the extratextual separation of fantasy and reality. When Currie talks about the boundary between fiction and criticism he is echoing Scholes' notion of fabulation opening a critical dialogue about how reality is negotiated, though Waugh prefers to call this the boundary between fiction and the *theory* of fiction, which is largely critical in nature. The key here is the manner in which the fiction breaches the boundary of reality and fiction through references to external narratives for the purposes of making a statement about fiction and fiction-making. The same phenomenon occurs in fantasy, as well as in the broader Fantastic, as David Sandner explains in his essay on 'Theorizing the Fantastic':[45]

> Fantastic literature initially emerges in the production of new, 'modern' literary ballads, fairy tales, oriental tales and the like, written in the style of those 'ancient' works found in numerous popular collections, such as Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and James MacPherson's dubious reconstruction of the 'lost' epics of an ancient bard in *Fragments* (p. 285) *of Ancient Poetry* (1760) and *The Works of Ossian* (1765), among many others.[46]

This transtextual dependence has been noted again and again. Tolkien utilizes the cauldron of story metaphor to describe the history of stories and fairy-stories that have 'always been boiling' and to which 'new bits' are added, from figures of myth and history to those of present day, so as to make up the archetypes and elements from which stories are constructed.[47] In his essay 'Fantasy and the Narrative Transaction', Attebery comments that for fantasy the validation of reality commonly

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[45] The fact that he is referring to the Fantastic as a whole is not discouraging to the comparison of metafiction to fantasy, however, as fantasy's roots follow, perhaps more so than other Fantastic genres, Sandner's argument.
[46] David Sandner, 'Theorizing the Fantastic: Editing *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* and the Six Stages of Fantasy Criticism', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 4 (2006), 277-301 (p. 286).
[47] Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', in *The Monster and the Critic* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), pp. 109-161.

expected in traditional fiction, does not come through realism (at least not in the traditional sense of the word), but through 'the communal sanction given to oral tradition' which includes 'myths, tales, legends, ballads, and superstitions'.[48] In 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula' he expands on this, writing that 'all modern fantasy has made such raids on the recorded inventory of traditional narratives [with the purpose of recapturing the original impulse of a myth]' so that though realist fiction is technically 'dependent on the devices of past story-tellers, […] fantasy is less able to distinguish its dependence. It cannot pretend to be unmediated reporting'.[49]

When theories of intertextuality are applied to fantasy, the genre's inherently metafictive nature becomes apparent. Michael Worton and Judith Still define intertextuality, first coined by Julia Kristeva, as 'the theory [that] insists that a text […] cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system'.[50] They continue saying that the reason why no text is completely divorced of other texts is because 'the writer is a reader of texts […] before s/he is a creator of texts, and therefore the work of art is inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind'.[51] This means that it is largely impossible for a narrative not to contain intertextual connections to other previous texts given that the writer is first and foremost a reader who will have been influenced by what they have read and who will inevitably reflect it in their narrative. Simultaneously, the writer reveals intent at mirroring, duplicating, and

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[48] Attebery, 'Fantasy and the Narrative Transaction', in *State of the Fantastic*, ed. by Nicholas Ruddick (Westport: CN, Greenwood Press, 1992), pp. 15-27 (p. 17).
[49] Attebery, 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula', p. 301.
[50] Michael Worton and Judith Still, eds., *Intertextuality: Theories and practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 1.
[51] Worton and Still, p. 1.

reconstructing the pre-text they are alluding to intertextually, and it is this conscious intent at referencing outside sources that can be said to expose the boundary between reality and fiction. For the genre of fantasy, this transtextual interconnectivity is ever-present and fundamental.[52]

Intertextuality, Metafiction and Fantasy

Modern fantasy operates in the same fashion as metafiction, not only inasmuch as all fiction operates through transtextual relationships (or all fiction employs metafiction to some degree or another), but also in that its relationship to its 'sign-system', its pre-text and taproots inform the writer and the reader how to interpret and interact with the fantasy narrative. Because of the change in belief system and the advent of modernity, fantastic narratives are utilized and transformed into new systems, into what is called modern fantasy. The connection to the pre-text is maintained, reinforced, and inherently necessary as it works as that 'intermediary common' between two or more narratives and the outside 'real world'.

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[52] As mentioned in the Introduction, 'transtextuality' is the term Genette uses for all forms of transference-relationships between texts. It is a concept that should be regarded as a quality that is present in all fiction; a quality and capacity to find connections and relationships to other texts on the premise that all writers are readers and will organically allude to other texts. Genette's studies lead him to propose five sub-categories: 'Kristevan intertextuality', which covers allusion as well as quotation and plagiarism; 'paratextuality', which covers the relations between the body of a text and its titles, epigraphs, illustrations, notes, and first drafts, among others; 'metatextuality', which encompasses the relationship between a commentary and its object; architextuality', defined as a tacit, perhaps even unconscious, gesture to genre-demarcations; and 'hypertextuality', which Genette described first as having the specific merit of energetically projecting pre-texts into new and different circuits of meaning and meaningfulness, and later restructured into the argument that the 'foremost characteristic of hypertextuality is that the hypertext does not (only) quote, but transforms and or imitates the hypotext. Like intertextuality and hypertextuality (which will be discussed ahead) many of these other sub-categories reflect a aspects of fantasy's metafictiveness too, though exploring them would result in a far too taxonomic work, in addition to being tangential to the main discussion. (Worton and Still, pp. 22-23; Sandor Klapcsik, 'Neil Gaiman's Irony, Liminal Fantasies, and Fairy Tale Adaptations', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 14 (2008) pp. 317-334 (p. 317).

Fantasy's dependence on transtextuality, and all that Genette's term implies, including intertextuality, is well documented. In 'Theorizing the Fantastic', Sandner describes how modern fantasy is understood by most critics to be not an ancient timeless thing, as the genre frequently would claim, but a genre born of a shift in belief and consciousness mostly from the eighteenth century onwards, and increasingly so in the following centuries. [53] Because fantasy, as defined now (fuzzily as that might be), is a genre that deals primarily with the impossible, it is necessary, as stated in the introduction, to limit fantasy to what is impossible 'now' (in modern times, though this is in itself a flexible and broad parameter). 'Older works', Sandner suggests, 'that existed in shadowy times when they *might* have been believed can be left aside as only possibly fantasy, as taproots to the genre itself'. [54] The importance of intentionality is hence exposed, for as Clute posits, the difference between a fantasy that existed centuries before and modern fantasies is not whether or not they were told and read with an understanding that their subjects were impossible, but that 'the perceived impossibility of these stories *[is] their point*'. [55]

In the Fairy-tale Studies series, Stephen Benson argues, for instance, the fairy tale is one of key influences on the overall fiction of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. [56] A.S. Byatt offers a similar sentiment in *On Histories and Stories* when she writes that 'the novel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has always incorporated forms of myths and fairy tales'. [57] Kevin Paul Smith goes as far as to

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[53] Sandner, 'Theorizing the Fantastic', p. 283.
[54] Sandner, p. 284.
[55] Clute, 'Fantasy', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 338.
[56] Stephen Benson, *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale*, Fairy-Tale Studies Series (Detroit: MI, Wayne State University Press, 2008), p. 10.
[57] Antonia Susan Byatt, *On Histories and Stories* (London : Vintage, 2001).

contend that 'the fairytale is [currently] being used for ends which can be called "postmodern"', though, as already mentioned, fantasy depends on these far more intrinsically and openly than traditional fiction.[58]

If fairytales, not to mention every other taproot, have influenced all contemporary fiction to some extent, it has influenced fantasy more as it provides readers and authors with a cultural-unconsciousness foregrounding that enables and mediates understanding of the impossible non-existent elements in fantasy fiction. Indeed, fairytales, along with myth, legend, folktale and folklore, fable, as well as the works of Dante, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Ovid, among countless others, have been vital to fantasy, and are vital in approaching fantasy. By comparison, Currie's examples of reference and allusion in Conrad and Joyce are overshadowed by fantasy's intrinsic dependence on its taproots, the intertextual connections to those taproots, and its dependence on a metafictive recognition on the part of both author and readers.

George MacDonald wrote in his essay on Fantasy and Fairy Tales that the feeling of the fantastic 'is not in the text at all', and that the reader must bring what is to be found in the text; their imagination must be set in motion.[59] That feeling of the fantastic is produced in the reader through the presence of the intertext, and its connections to their pre-texts and taproots, connections which, in turn, are brought forth by the author's inclusion of 'those things brought to the text', i.e. those elements that derive from outside the text. In addition, intertextuality also accounts for the feeling of timelessness or ancientness the reader feels in most modern fantasy

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[58] Kevin Paul Smith, *The Postmodern Fairytale* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007), p. 1.
[59] Sandner, 'Theorising the Fantastic', p. 291.

narratives. By employing taproots and pre-texts that contain elements, archetypes, language, imagery, styles and forms that, whether once believed in or not, carry with them the sense of fantastic impossibility, modern fantasy can project a sense of timelessness and ancientness, while simultaneously constructing new stories. Rosemary Jackson's transcendentalist approach identifies this as 'a nostalgic, humanistic vision', mentioning by way of example writers like Tolkien, Lewis and T.H. White's 'romance fictions'. She points out their fantasies' attempts to recapture and revivify the lost moral and social hierarchies, presumably of those previous, now-seen-as-fantastic, narratives.[60] By making allusive and referential connections to those previously not-necessarily-fantastic narratives, they apply the feelings and interpretations of those texts to the new fantasies.

It is because of this important influence that fantasy needs to be explored first for its intertextuality, giving special consideration to the author's intentions, background, influences, and sources. Despite postmodern conventions regarding the higher importance of the reader over the author, in fantasy, the intertextual connections are just as important and significant to the very structure and creation of the narrative as the reader's interpretation and self-awareness of those connections. Recognition of these forces (or connections), says Jackson:

> [I]nvolves placing authors in relation to historical, social, economic, […] determinants, as well as to a literary tradition of fantasy [which] makes it impossible to accept a reading of this kind of literature which places it somehow mysteriously 'outside' time altogether.[61]

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[60] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 2.
[61] Jackson, p. 3.

The fact is then that fantasy cannot exist without the continual presence of its taproots 'informing' (providing meaningful code to) the narrative. Fantasy's pre-text provides not only concrete elements like settings and characters, although this is one of its most prominent characteristics (gods, fantastic creatures, fantastic weapons, lands and realms of wonder), but significantly brings the sense of wonder (via allusions to narratives that once might have been regarded as true and possible) and timelessness (via establishing connections to perceived bygone eras) itself along with the familiarity with the fantastic as a whole.

For example, fantasy narratives such as Hope Mirrlees' *Lud-in-the-Mist* (1926) or Lord Dunsany's (Edward Plunkett's) fantasy novels *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924) or *The Charwoman's Shadow* (1926), exhibit a fantasy perspective that is clearly modern, as they are not told in the manner myths and legends would be told (the writer does not believe in the existence of the fantastic beings in the narratives) nor entirely following the purpose of fables and fairytales (the writer's focus is not primarily to convey a moral lesson or make a cautionary metaphor). Instead, their primary aim is to storytell – to, as Scholes' fabulation states, take joy in the creative act. At the same time, they draw from and rely on these taproots, particularly fairytales and English folklore, as the basis of their stories.

In Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, the people of the land of Erl desire to be ruled over by a magical lord. To this end, the decidedly non-magical lord's son, Alveric, travels to the fantastic realm of Elfland in search of the Elf King's daughter, Lirazel. Elfland is a dangerous and difficult land to traverse given that time and space operate differently from 'the real world'. Time moves slower in

Elfland than in the human world, and its location, and more specifically, its entrance, are subject to the Elf King's will. After Lirazel marries Alveric and gives him a son, she grows tired of Erl and flees back to her father. Alveric then must spend the majority of the novel searching for a way back to Elfland, although the realm's borders continually keep shifting. If there is a metaphor or symbolism to be derived from this, it is one that complements the narrative-focus by suggesting that the borders and parameters of fantasy and the fantastic are, as Tolkien put it, 'uncatchable', i.e., they resist, by the very nature of their components, being defined against traditional realist norms. It should be noted, however, that this metaphor (intended or interpreted) is metafictive in itself; it alludes to the fiction's status as a fiction, to its constructive elements, and to its historical fuzziness or intangibility. Moreover, it serves to reinforce the wonder of the subject matter, not to deprive it of its narrative potential by reducing it to mere symbolism.[62]

The sense of wonder experienced by the reader stems from their familiarity with concepts of magic, elves and other fairy-creatures, and their intrigue at how these elements will be recombined to make a new story. The reader's mind is immediately tied to the fantasy metatext which enables them to identify and understand those beings and concepts that do not accordingly exist in the actual world. That awareness produces in the reader an acceptance of the fantastic without taking away from them their sense of 'the marvellous'. Instead, it fuels it by intertextually transposing the now-considered fantastic feelings and responses to the text. This

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[62] Which is not to say that stories that employ fantasy's taproots cannot be primarily or chiefly allegorical, symbolic or metaphorical, but that those that are, are not 'fantasy' because they are not concerned with portraying fantasy but with establishing wholly different correspondences with reality. Equally, fantasy narratives can be metaphorically applied by the reader to suit their experiences, and entails a wholly different correspondence than allegory. See Tolkien's distinction between 'applicability' and 'allegory' ('Foreword to the Second Edition', in *The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), p. xxii-xxv (p. xxiv).

causes a doubleness of mind which will be explored in the reader-response section as well as the subversion section. Nevertheless, in order for the reader's awareness to be activated, it must be placed there, or at least initiated by the author, purposefully intertextual, i.e., metafictively.

The intentionality of these intertextual connections is observable between Mirrlees' novel and the fantasy's pre-texts she employs. *Lud-in-the-Mist* is set primarily in the 'Free State' of Dorimare, a country that lies next to the Debatable Hills (or Elfin Hills, as they are also called) on the border with Fairyland. The immediate naming of Fairyland in the beginning of the novel (in the first introductory paragraph) serves as an instant allusion to fairytales and to folkloric superstitions regarding a world that lies close alongside the human world, populated by non-human yet-material beings with magical powers who regularly abduct people (most often girls).[63] By establishing this connection, the novel allows the reader to open their awareness to the fairytale metanarrative and apply it to *Lud* as a means of constructing meaning. Mirrlees continues to establish this connection to folklore and fairytales with her descriptions of the interactions between Dorimare and Fairyland narrating that, for instance, '[t]here had […] been no intercourse between the two countries for many centuries', alluding to notions that hint at real pre-sixteenth century taboos and superstitions concerning interaction with fairies. [64]

As Simpson and Roud explain about Tudor and Stuart times in *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, dealings with fairies appears to be reserved to village healers and

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[63] Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, eds., *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 115-117.
[64] Hope Mirrlees, *Lud-in-the-Mist* (London: Millennium, 2001 [originally 1926]), p. 1.

people who claimed unusual powers granted by fairies.[65] Despite occasional

instances of benevolence or advantages gained from consorting with Fairyland,

fairies and all things faerie, have more commonly been associated with mischief,

danger, demons, and, as mentioned, even abduction. These connotations and

characteristics become metafictionally ascribed to *Lud* though Mirrlees' use of these

taproot terms so that readers whether consciously aware or not, are able to employ

whatever fantasy pre-texts they possess to recognize and understand things like

fairies.

In Dorimare 'fairy fruit' is forbidden – '[it] was regarded as a loathsome and filthy

vice perhaps' – alluding to the folk taboo against picking blackberries after a certain

period of the year. [66] There is also a likely hint of allusion to Christina Rossetti's

'Goblin Market' and the fact that the goblins use fruits to lure the two sisters as well

as cause ecstatic frenzies (another element mirrored in *Lud-in-the-Mist* with the

Dorimarites fearing the fairy fruits caused 'madness, suicide, orgiastic dances, and

wild doings under the moon', and that eating it made the eater wish to run off to

Fairyland).[67] Naturally, there is also a cultural connection to the euphemistic usage

of fairies in reference to drugs. In the text, the word 'drug' is actually used twice in

reference to reason, which is, for Endymion Leer, akin to 'the juice of the poppy',

and not to the fairy fruits themselves. Readers familiar with the nineteenth century

euphemisms would undoubtedly have read these implications in the text.[68]

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[65] Simpson and Roud, p. 116.

[66] Mirrlees, p. 16. George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858) also alludes to this tradition when Anodon (the main character) refrains initially from eating the fruit of Fairyland before deciding the risks were worth it.

[67] Mirrlees, p. 17.

[68] The connection between fairies (and fairytales/fantasies) and drugs is no surprise as both are often viewed as means by which to escape reality, and just as equally dangerous. In his book *The Road to Excess* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), Marcus Boom includes various examples of drugs being personified as fairies, from Erasmus Darwin's descriptions of the poppy (pp. 23-24),

Ultimately, the idea that eating supernatural fruit is dangerous and causes errors in judgment ultimately derives from mythology and religion, with tales such as that of Persephone, or the biblical Eve. This is merely one of several examples of direct allusion and reference to pre-texts of fantasy.

Mirrlees' aim is arguably to create that sense of timelessness, ancientness and wonder with her depiction of Fairyland, with descriptions of fairies and superstitions being clearly carefully selected. One example of this is the novel's connection to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream* through Mirrlees' selection of the name Aubrey, for the character who had the closest connection to fairies. The reference to Shakespeare's Oberon, a name which Shakespeare took from a French text instead of folklore, serves to solidify in the reader the Duke of Aubrey's ancient connection to Fairyland. The fact that the French name 'Aubrey' comes from the Old High German for 'Alberic' meaning 'ruler of elves', the same as Oberon, is unmistakable.[69] In fact, Neil Gaiman's 2002 introduction to *Lud* not only identifies the connection to English lore but even comments on the Aubrey-Oberon link.[70] This is not to say that the reader of *Lud* is supposed to know the linguistic connotations of a reference like 'Aubrey' or even that Mirrlees chose the name with this complex intertextual connection in mind (indeed, she might well have only chosen it because it was her brother-in-law's name), but instead it serves to illustrate

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Debut de Laforest's calling morphine 'the grey fairy' (p. 49), and Robert Desnos' derision of opiates in favor of the white fairy heroin, toJohn Uri Lloyd's fantasy hollow earth novel *Etidorhpa* where the narrator is offered, not fruit, but a fungal potion that 'sends him into an extravagant dream of higher fairy land' (p. 228). Mirrlees, thus, in suggesting this possible interpretation, succeeds in reinforcing the sense of wonder by evoking the ethereal and supernatural aspects of fairies, as well as the addictive dangers of fairy fruit/drugs.

[69] Online Etymology Dictionary, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Aubrey&allowed_in_frame=0> [accessed 2 August 2012]. It is also curious, though not transtextually verifiable, that Dunsany's Alveric, the human prince who goes to Elfland, is very similar to Alberic.

[70] Neil Gaiman, 'Introduction', in *Lud-in-the-Mist* by Hope Mirrlees (London: Millennium, 2001), pp. vii-viii (p. viii).

how the mere reference to the fairy king Oberon operates so as to enable the reader to ascribe their extratextual 'knowledge' of fairy-lore to *Lud*.

By employing and repurposing elements (characters, concepts, powers, settings) belonging to the now-regarded-as-fantastic vast taproot text repertoire for the purposes of constructing stories about fantasy worlds that signal to those extratextual sources, modern fantasy stories reveal their own storicity. In almost every fantasy narrative the influences of myth, legend, and particularly folk and fairytale are unmistakable. Where traditional fiction might do this in a circuitous and metaphoric (symbolic) sense, fantasy does it explicitly. Frank L. Baum's introduction to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is an example of how fantasy authors are aware of this:

> Folklore, legends, myths and fairy tales have followed childhood through the ages, for every healthy youngster has a wholesome and instinctive love for stories fantastic, marvelous and manifestly unreal. The winged fairies of Grimm and Andersen have brought more happiness to childish hearts than all other human creations.

> Yet the old time fairy tale, having served for generations, may now be classed as "historical" in the children's library; for the time has come for a series of newer "wonder tales" in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incidents devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale. Modern education includes morality; therefore the modern child seeks only entertainment in its wonder tales and gladly dispenses with all disagreeable incident.

> Having this thought in mind, the story of "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" was written solely to please children of today. It aspires to being a

modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out.[71]

It is because the folklore, legend and myths are recognized and acknowledged as being fantastic and manifestly unreal that the intertext's metafictive linkage to past-belief and present-recognition is necessary. The intertext and its interactions on the level outside of the immediate narrative inform the reader of what the fantastic is and what it does. A witch, for instance, is a woman with magical powers from which standpoint a narrative can then transform her into a bad witch or a good witch, or play with the conventions of what magical powers entail. The intertextual connections, however, inevitably link the word with the immense metatext steeped in possible meanings. Moreover, the recognition of the fantastic and supernatural unrealness of witches allows the reader to ascribe a sense of wonder and marvel to the story, as the narrative invokes a historical intertext through which to read it.[72]

When Mirrlees or Dunsany write 'Fairyland' or 'Elfland' they find no need to explain the meaning of the term, and instead they only offer colourful descriptions of those lands. They describe how people (supposed normal everyday citizens of Dorimare or Erl) see the magical realm, but each author has no need to explain the concept of an elf or fairy, nor even the nature of Faërie, to the reader. In addition, there is barely a need for them to go into great detail about how fairies, elves, and other magical/supernatural elements work, because the narrative presupposes an awareness or at least familiarity with the 'architext' (Genette's overarching transtextual level/realm/stage). The reader is not surprised or confused by the

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[71] Frank L. Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Kansas: University of Kansas, 1999), p. vii.
[72] This should be recognized as distinct from a genre like magic realism where the purpose of employing an apparently fantastic element is not to depict unreality, but actual reality comprised partly of the uncanny, strange and unusual.

fantastic in the sense that the author eases their entrance into the fantasy landscape by appealing to feelings and elements familiar to the reader; timeless, ancient tropes, settings and forms they can accept in concept. At the same time they can experience the sense of wonder in the face of the marvellous thanks to the transformations enacted upon the intertext by the author.

Another example can be seen in Carlo Collodi's novel *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, a modernized fairy tale that clearly draws its influence from earlier stories for children and folklore for the purpose of making a story that signals to those tales. The Oxford Classics edition of the novel mentions in the introduction that Collodi was commissioned to translate Charles Perrault's fairy tales around 1876, and their influence is notable. The first line of the novel immediately alludes to fairy tales before Collodi proceeds to break this traditional construct, a characteristic 'transposition' (and overall transtextual and hence transformational) process of metafiction:

> Once upon a time there was...
> 'A king!' my little readers will say straight away. No, children, you are
> mistaken. Once upon a time there was a piece of wood.[73]

As Ann Lawson Lucas comments in the introduction to the aforementioned edition:

> Collodi employs the traditional fairy-tale opening, but converts it to his own
> purposes, combining the pleasures of familiarity and surprise. [...] Fairy tales
> generally tell of the exceptional. Here the children are recalled from the
> automatic hierarchical thinking inculcated by traditional stories and are

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[73] Carlo Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, trans. by Ann Lawson Lucas (Oxford: Oxford Classics, 2000; repr. 2009), p. 1.

invited to consider something very mundane, basic, everyday, something they have experienced – something real.[74]

The reader response alluded to here will be, as previously mentioned, looked at further ahead, however the very fact that it requires a 'recollection' or recognition of a traditional story, in this case other fairy tales but in other fantasies any number of taproots, demonstrates how fundamentally intrinsic these connections are to the genre. These connections, put in place intentionally by Collodi's reference of 'Once upon a time', a common fairytale opening, inform the reader of how they should read the story before promptly turning it around. All fantasy necessarily performs this action: calling attention to the taproots in order to set the stage, the language, the elements, and more importantly the feeling of wonder and marvel, only to then transform those taproots into something the reader has not experienced before.

The conversion, so characteristic of metafiction, is the starting point of fantasy. MacDonald's *Phantastes*, often regarded as the first fantasy novel intended for adults, was employing this metafictional transformation of the pre-text in 1858. If Collodi demonstrates a tendency to reference Perrault's fairytales, more so does MacDonald toward the folkloric pre-fantasy metatext, as seen not only in the direct inclusion, by name, of fairies, dryads, Fairy Land and Faerie, magic, wish granting, warnings about fairy fruit, and the usage of tropes like waking a sleeping maiden with a kiss or a song, but in the specific referencing of fairytales as both folklore and literary stories. This occurs from the very beginning when Anodos discusses fairytales with his fairy grandmother:

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[74]Ann Lawson Lucas, 'Introduction to *The Adventures of Pinocchio*', in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, pp. vii-xlvi (p. xxiv).

"Your little sister was reading a fairy-tale to you last night."

"She was."

"When she had finished, she said, as she closed the book, 'Is there a fairy country, brother?' You replied with a sigh, 'I suppose there is, if one could find the way into it.'"

"I did; but I meant something quite different from what you seem to think."

"Never mind what I seem to think. You shall find the way into Fairy Land tomorrow."[75]

It is further exemplified when Anodos finds a magical library in the palace of Faerie, that houses books of fantastic stories that the reader can step into and experience as the characters do. These stories, fairytales within Faerie, metafictionally transform the reader's perceptions of the taproots: 'In the fairy book, everything was just as it should be, though whether in words or something else, I cannot tell. It glowed and flashed the thoughts upon the soul, with such a power that the medium disappeared from the consciousness, and it was occupied only with the things themselves'.[76] There are other frequent references to fairytales as texts throughout the narrative, as Anodos uses them to make sense and interpret the rules of Faerie ('And now I found, as in many instances before, how true the fairy tales are.').[77] Anodos' regards for Fairy Land, prior to his adventures, were a symbolic one – he thought it to be solely an idea – yet upon meeting his fairy grandmother and embarking on an adventure within Fairy Land, it becomes a real tangible thing to him. The reader, on their part, are equally drawn into the impossibility of the narrative, while retaining a simultaneous awareness of the fairytale (and the supernatural/folkloric) hypertext. This is also reinforced through the quotes MacDonald uses at the beginning of his chapters, from Novalis' wondrous tales and thoughts on fables/fairytales (Märchen),

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[75] George MacDonald, *Phantastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), p. 8.
[76] MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 80.
[77] MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 66.

to the mythological allusions to a poem by Friedrich Schiller, folktales like those collected by Francis James Child, and Goethe's *Faust*.

Fairytales are oftentimes placed in a different category to fantasy because their primary focus is not necessarily on the impossible, fantastic or the wondrous as much as it is on conveying a particular moral or values lesson (consider Perrault's fairytales in particular which end with a moral aimed at children). Modern fairytales, on the other hand, still belong to the overarching literature of the Fantastic. In addition, nineteenth-century fairytales also demonstrate a kind of self-awareness about 'fairytales', implying that they are using older tales as their own pre-texts. MacDonald's statement about how a fairytale is not an allegory though it may contain allegory supports this change. [78] Because of this, a comparison between tales about fairies and fairytales, such as those of Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) or George MacDonald (1824-1905), also offers examples of the recognition of the shift between the taproots and the modern narratives. There is a recognizable difference between fairytales from before and after the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries, right about the same time that Sandner, Clute and Attebery (among others) place the beginnings of fantasy as moving toward what is recognized and – mostly – identified as 'modern fantasy'. Indeed, 'some scholars date the rise of modern fantasy from the first half of the nineteenth century, when Hans Christian Andersen used elements of traditional stories in authoring literary tales'.[79]

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[78] George MacDonald, 'The Fantastic Imagination', in *The Complete Fairy Tales* (Digireads.com Publishing, 2009), pp. 5-8 (p. 6).
[79] Bernice E. Cullinan and Diane G. Person, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (New York: Continuum, 2001), p 275.

In his preface to one of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale collections, Charles Boner states that the stories are:

> […] not all strictly speaking fairy-tales, yet seem […] to come from Fairy-land; for they have the strange witchery about them that when a child reads he sees just such pictures as delight his young fancy; and when a grown-up person takes them in his hand he is equally delighted, though he sees them quite differently to the child, for to him there are hidden meanings and deep wisdom in what appears to some a mere childish tale.[80]

Boner identifies the feeling of wonder, magic and ancientness that Andersen's tales produce in the reader, whether they be young or old, when he wonders, rather whimsically, whether Andersen might have been given his inspirations by elves and pixies in Denmark.[81] That feeling of having a connection to supernatural beings is unlikely one to have been believed in 1869 though the feeling of it still remains by virtue of tying the folklore and legend to modern fairy tales.

In his essay on '"The Snow Queen" and the White Witch' Gunhild Agger mentions Jackie Wullschläger's claims about how the Grimm brothers 'spread the 'power legend' [while] Hans Christian Andersen 'invented the literary fairy tale'' until eventually both merged into the fantastic metanarrative.[82] Andersen, like the Grimm brothers before him, and George MacDonald after him, derived inspiration and material from oral fairy tales and folktale legends, retelling them into new, seemingly timeless, narratives, that made them part of the overarching fantastic

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[80] Charles Boner, *Fairy Tales by Hans Christian Andersen* (New York: Allen Brothers, 1869), p. xi.
[81] Boner, p. xii.
[82] Gunhild Agger, '"The Snow Queen" and the White Witch', in *Marvellous Fantasy*, ed. by Jørgen Riber Christensen (Aalborg, Denmark: Aalborg University Press, 2009), pp. 167-192 (p. 174).

narrative which later became part of modern fantasy's taproot itself. As Agger

expands, Andersen constantly experimented by:

> [E]xploring and combining various kinds of fairy tales with the historical
> tale, the fable, the parable, the legend, the myth, the symbolic or allegorical
> tale, and poems. […] he also mixed elements from various types when he
> retold a story. Additionally, when compared to the traditional folk tale, an
> unhappy ending is more the rule than the exception in Andersen's oeuvre. By
> experimenting with genres and mixing elements, Andersen explored a
> number of ways in which the traditional "eventyr" [adventure] could be
> transformed. In doing so, among other things he anticipated the fantasy
> genre.[83]

Intertextuality is thus vital to fantasy, and although the same can be said of all

fiction as it is an inescapable part of literature, fantasy's inter- and eventual trans –

textuality is much more prominent and evident not only in its presence and influence

on the genre, but in its retrospective (transhistorical) usage in decoding meaning. At

the same time, fantasy demonstrates a simultaneously stricter common intertext and

a looser regard for literary rules. The genre itself draws upon a common group of

sources, pre-texts and taproots (some more than others), which as Genette explains

of intertextuality (Kristevan) 'presupposes the perception of a relationship between

it [the current text] and another text', and whose acknowledgement is necessary for

understanding.[84] The pre-texts and taproots can never be dissevered from fantasy not

simply because fantasy derives from those sources and is the product of a belief

shift, but because those sources inform the reading of the text. Fantasy's pre-text and

the intertextual connections made by the author to those outside texts, breaking out

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[83] Agger, pp. 174-175.
[84] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Nebraska: Nebraska University Press, 1997; originally Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1982), p 2.

of the confines of the narrative to refer to previous stories, is necessary in order for the 'impossible' of fantasy to be interpreted, understood and appreciated by the reader. They may make the reader aware of other stories and of the concept of Story, and then proceed to breach the fantasy narrative the author is constructing, but without it, the fantasy could not be sustained.

Section 3: Reader Response

> *If we assume that writing manages to go beyond the limitations of the author, it will continue to have a meaning only when it is read by a single person and it passes through his mental circuits. Only the ability to be read by a given individual proves that what is written shares in the power of writing, a power based on something that goes beyond the individual. The universe will express itself as long as somebody will be able to say, "I read, therefore it writes".*[85]

Any given writing could have a clear/unclear meaning or intention and may require particular knowledge or awareness, but it is ineffective without a reader to respond to it. While author intent and the importance of direct allusions or references to the pre-texts is significant in fantasy as it is indicative of one of the metafictional ways in which the genre operates, in literary studies several theorists, in particular poststructuralist critics, have made extensive arguments concerning the superiority or higher relevance of the reader's participation and role concerning the text. Calvino's quote at the top reflects these postmodern/poststructuralist views, particularly those of Roland Barthes, concerning the roles of the author and the reader. Postmodern literary criticism argues even that the reader's reaction, their interpretation and reception of a text is more significant than the author's intent. In

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[85] Calvino, *If On a Winter's Night A Traveler*, p. 139

'Death of the Author', Barthes famously states that the meaning of a work depends on reader's interpretation rather than the 'life', 'passions' and 'tastes' of the writer.[86] Similarly, when discussing fantasy, most critics analyse the texts (as do most critics in regards to fiction) according to the feelings, responses and interpretations of the narrative over the author's intent.

Fantasy theorists also emphasize the importance of the reader's 'decision making', their 'hesitation' before the fantastic and 'perceptions' of it, their 'encounter with the impossible', their 'bewilderment' and 'interpretation', their 'imagination', and their 'response to the fantastic' more than the author's intent.[87] The fantasy author's allusions and references are indicative of the inescapability of intertextuality in fantasy (given that the author is also a reader of fiction, and presumably of other fantasies) as well as the genre's necessary dependence on and inheritance of its taproots. The reader's response exposes even more fantasy's metafictional nature, as a fantasy narrative forces the reader to enter a state of double thought in which they must hold contradictions and impossibilities simultaneously in order for the fantasy world to remain stable, or as stable as a fiction which is unstable and untameable by nature can be. The implications of this doubleness are one of fantasy's subversive and therefore metafictional qualities and are the focus of the subsequent section, while this section looks at how the reader reacts and what they do in order to approach metafiction and consequently fantasy. In short, the reader's input and

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[86] Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author', *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148 (p. 143).
[87] Stanislaw Lem, 'Todorov's Fantastic Theory of Literature', in *Science Fiction Studies*, 4 (Fall 1974) 227-237 (p. 232). Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975). Gary K. Wolfe (but cited through Sandner's essay 'Theorizing the Fantastic', p. 271. David Sandner, 'Theorizing the Fantastic', p. 288. George MacDonald, 'The Fantastic Imagination', pp. 5-8. Brian Attebery, 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula', p. 301.

response to the narrative is as relevant and indicative of metafictionality in the genre as what the narrative does in turn to the reader.

What is Reader Response?

For the purpose of this discussion, reader response will be defined to be, if not the opposite of author intent, then its complementary parallel. The reader, as they bring their own knowledge and awareness to the text, is capable of interpreting a text differently from the way the author intended it to be. On one hand, it is the natural way to encounter a text – as a reader – and on the other, it enriches the narrative by expanding its interpretative output from that intended by the author. Their response implies an interaction between the reader and text as the latter informs the reader 'how' to read it, and the former inputs their own personal knowledge and reading experience back into the text. As Rosenblatt puts it, the reader 'must be alert to the clues concerning character and motive present in the text' using their 'own assumptions' to 'provide the tentative framework for such an interpretation'.[88] This interaction is an active one as the reader forms part of the writer-text-reader 'meaning' contract. This contract or subconscious arrangement between 'addressor', 'message' and 'addressee' is what enables the reader to interact with the narrative. At the same time, because the reader is responding to the input from this message, indicators about what the reader needs in order to interpret the message and how the reader does this can be determined based on the implications in the structure of that message.

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[88] Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1983), pp. 11-12.

Reader response presents itself in various forms as the narrative moulds and plays with the reader's consciousness and demands their awareness. Because of its wider range of interpretation it is best studied in terms of how the reader response occurs: through the connections to other texts they make. In the same way that the author is first a reader, and can therefore not escape alluding to past narrative texts, or utilizing those pre-texts to give and structure meaning in the new narrative, the reader who theoretically is a reader of other texts can also not escape making connections to past texts in order to respond to the prompting from the narrative. The writer need not even make direct references in order for the reader to make connections and comparisons/contrasts to other texts they have encountered previously. The author's intent is appreciated through intertextuality because they are purposeful connections placed between the narrative and one or a set of specific pre-texts; the reader's response, by virtue of being individual to each reader, is more subtle and unspecific and conducted more accurately through hypertextuality.

Reader Response through Fantasy Hypertextuality

Hypertextuality is those connections which may be identified in the text, but which are not implicit or necessarily placed there intentionally by the author. For fantasy, this means that the metatextual and thereby metafictional dynamics unfolding include not just the intertextual connections that link a historical narrative taproot to a text, giving meaning and context to each fantasy narrative's impossible and wondrous elements, but also the reader's usage of that intertext and through that usage, transforming their perceptions of the taproots. The metafictive meaning-decoding conduit, as it were, does not only proceed from past to present, but from

present to past. Unlike traditional fiction, where a combination of mostly indeterminate and interchangeable texts and actual-world experiences are involved in this meaning-making exchange, in fantasy a very determined taproot (culturally vast, but narrower than the actual world) is employed, as occurs in other intertextually metafictive texts. For instance, the Norse gods pre-texts reference in Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword* are not part of any reader's actual-world experiences. Their recognition and acceptance of them stems from their conscious awareness of story, myth and fantasy. These in turn work retrospectively from the reader's experience through the text and to the taproots to transform them so that the stories of, in this case, Norse gods, become richer and broader for being used to interpret the present text. Attebery proposed a similar notion when he said in *Stories About Stories* that:

> [Instead] of spending much time simply identifying a particular Celtic myth in a work of modern fantasy, we should look at how the fantasist [or interpreting reader] appropriates from, engages with, travesties, and reconstitutes the myth. The modern reuse will never be the same as the original performance. Most myths come down to us stripped of context. The voices, gestures, rituals, and social interactions that once guided interpretation are gone. Fantasy provides new contexts, and thus inevitably new meanings, for myth. Fantasy spins stories about the stories.[89]

In short, though here Attebery is discussing primarily the author's role in taproot re-appropriation, 'each distortion, each elaboration on mythic motifs,' whether enacted intertextually by the author, or hypertextually by the reader, 'offers a new way to relate to ancient beliefs and seemingly timeless mysteries'.[90] This form of

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[89] Attebery, *Stories About Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 3.
[90] Attebery., p. 4.

transformation is distinct from intertextuality in that 'the hypertext does not (only) quote, but transforms and or imitates the hypotext'.[91]

In Sandor Klapscik's essay on Liminal Fantasies (a category of Fantasy that bears close comparison to the proposed concept of 'metafantasy') he explains that Genette's hypertextuality is:

> […] any relationship uniting text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary.[92]

Whereas intertextuality, in fantasy, offers a commentary on the way fantasy stories are constructed – of the operating metatext – hypertextuality reveals another side of the genre's metafictiveness. Klapcsik expands that 'hypertextuality has to be distinguished from intertextuality, as the latter indicates a text directly quoting from or alluding to another text', or as Genette puts it: 'the actual presence of one text within another'.[93] Conversely:

> [The] foremost characteristic of hypertextuality is that the hypertext does not (only) quote, but transforms and or imitates the hypotext: 'text B… [is] unable to exist, as such, without A, from which it originates … and which it consequently evokes more or less perceptibly without necessarily speaking of it or citing it.'[94]

In other words, the hypotext is broader (and often more vague) than the intertext because it is formed, not only of the writer's pre-texts but by the reader's as well,

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[91] Klapcsik, 'Neil Gaiman's Irony, Liminal Fantasies, and Fairy Tale Adaptations', p. 320. Note, here Klapcsik is referencing Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 5].
[92] Klapcsik, p. 320.
[93] Klapcsik, p. 320.
[94] Klapcsik, p. 320.

and it not only references a pre-text, but transforms it. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* works as an example of this. Intertextually, as Tolkien himself documented, the Legendarium specifically connects to a Germanic and Nordic taproot (among others). Hypertextually, however, the reader does not need to have a strictly Germanic pre-text background in order to decode the fantastic and wondrous features of the text. Instead, the broad fantasy hypotext is used, and then retrospectively transformed, as the reader first uses their knowledge of, for example, fairytale elves and dwarves, and then transforms those experiences to adopt and include Tolkien's versions. The hypotext is thereby metafictionally (extratextual) transformed by the fantasy reader. This is part of a long hypertextual transformation of the way these characters, beings, tropes, are regarded in the overall metatext.

For example, in 'On Fairy Stories', Tolkien discusses the transformation of fairies into creatures of diminutive size saying that 'the notion is a leading one in modern use' and 'largely a product of literary fancy […] in which William Shakespeare and Michael Drayton played a part'.[95] He further despairs that this physical reduction is the transformation of Faerie and Elfland into 'mere finesse' and 'fragility' through inoffensive and charming names (such as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).[96] In other words, Shakespeare's and Drayton's, among others, depictions are unable to exist without fairy-lore and folklore, but their versions hypertextually transform those hypotexts and thus changed future perceptions of them. Nineteenth century conventions of fairies (and, more importantly, fairytales), then, which were influenced by Shakespeare's and could not exist without it, as Tolkien puts it, also transformed and added to that hypotext as well (Tolkien mentions Andrew Lang's

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[95] Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', p. 111
[96] Tolkien, p. 111.

colour fairy books and Perrault's tales as examples of this transformation). Each fantasy (or fantastic, or taproot) hypotext is further transformed by each text that is grafted out from and onto the fantasy metatext, so that later readers might metafictionally employ Tolkien's own writings to decode *The Faerie Queen* (drawing hypertextual parallels between the archetype of the hero, wizard figures like Gandalf and Merlin, or enchanted objects like Merlin's globe and Galadriel's mirror or Saruman's palantír, for example), or Dunsany as their experiential antecedent to *Midsummer*, precisely because these texts have been transtextually embedded into the same expanding metatext.

Genette's use of the word 'grafted' is also curious as it illustrates transtextuality as a whole, as well as more specifically hypertextuality and fantasy's hypertextuality. It implies both an insertion/addition of something external and a transformation of that external subject as it becomes part of the new object. In literary terms it can mean the allusion or quoting of another text (pre-text) in a new text while changing the original. Because those references are 'evoked', which is to say, the reader is encouraged by the text to remember and identify, they must be mediated by the reader's experiences and their awareness. These then, of course, become more difficult to identify, because different readers' hypotexts (earlier texts), are not necessarily interchangeable with the writer's or other readers'. Nonetheless, this hypertext is fantastic in subject nature, and it is this that makes fantasy metafictive. Tolkien's own depictions of various fantastic elements, elves that are tall, beautiful, mysterious, wise, and proud, or dwarves that are short, gruff, bearded, skilled in mining and forging for instance, heavily influenced the fantasy that came after, from the Dragonlance books, the Forgotten Realms books, and Moorcock, to Pratchett,

Gaiman, and George R.R. Martin. [97] For example, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*

comments on how Dark Lords in genre fantasy are often modelled on Tolkien's

Sauron, from Stephen R. Donaldson's Lord Foul to Terry Goodkind's Darken Rahl

and J.K. Rowling's Lord Voldemort (or, parodically, in Diana Wynne Jones' Dark

Lord Derk or Pratchett's Evil Harry Dread).[98] However, readers who read these

latter texts first, would then employ them as their hypotext from which to interpret

and decode *Lord of the Rings*. This is, naturally, also applicable to other early

modern fantasy texts, such as those collected in Lin Carter's Ballantine Adult

Fantasy Series (1965-69; 1969-74), which would now be read by contemporary

readers exposed to fantasy narratives influenced by them (see chapters two and three

for this type of reader response).

Thus, fantasy, by its metafictive nature, is engaged in a transtextual exchange,

through its reader responsive reactions in decoding it, with hypotexts across its

entire metatext. The deconstructive/reconstructive connotations of hypertextuality,

the idea of grafting external texts while being aware of those processes, as well as

the fact that it makes the reader participate actively in the reconstruction (grafting),

demonstrates further how the genre is metafictional. What is particularly key is how

this type of connection reveals that the new text is, as Genette posits, unable to exist

without the source text(s). Fantasy's critically acknowledged inability to exist

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[97] In 'There and Back Again', Gillespie and Crouse state that 'Gary Gygax [co-creator of *D&D*] poached popular culture texts, folklore, and classic mythology for inspiration […] for example, the Treants of D&D from Tolkien's Ents' (452) or 'famous archetypal dungeons [… like] Tolkien's Lonely Mountain […] and the Mines of Moria' (455). (Greg Gillespie and Darren Crouse, 'There and Back Again: Nostalgia, Art, and Ideology in Old-School Dungeons and Dragons,' *Games and Culture*, 7 (2012), pp. 441-470.). David M. Ewalt makes a similar statement saying that though the games' world is 'invented by its players' it is 'inspired by centuries of storytelling and literature [and] books like J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* helped set the tone.' (*Of Dice and Men: The Story of Dungeons & Dragons and the People Who Play It* (New York: Scribner, 2013), p. 5.)

[98] Roz Kaveney, 'Dark Lord', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 250.

divorced of its taproot influences is further emphasised by its reliance on hypertextuality in meaning-making for the reader.

In essence, fantasy's hypertextuality is metafictional in two ways: in that it reveals the importance of the reader's aware and creative response, and in that it bares the presence of external texts connected to the narrative, even from the reader's perspective. Thus, not only is, for example, *Lud-in-the-Mist* making direct purposeful connections to fairytale and English folklore, intended as such by Mirrlees, but the reader utilizes the fantasy taproots and metatext to derive and construct the means by which to recognize and accept the fantastic elements in the narrative. These hypertextual connections on part of the reader, however, need not be entirely limited to those pre-texts that can be determined to have been used by Mirrlees, but can be extended to any and all pre-texts from the reader's point of view.

In other words, the reader's hypotext can be comprised of larger, smaller, equal or dissimilar sets of pre-texts to those used by and intended by Mirrlees for instance, but the focus of those pre-texts is and must be predicated by the genre's collective amount of interrelated texts (by the fantasy metanarrative), lest a fantasy narrative be approached, not for its contents, but in search of metaphorical symbolism for lacking a set of signifiers that accounts for those impossible unrealistic components. If these hypertextual signifiers are removed, or not possessed by the reader at all, alternative non-fantasy solutions must be sought in order to resolve the appearance of impossible and fantastic elements in the fictional narrative. If, when reading about fairies, the reader is not, however subtly or remotely, aware of a Faerie that is the

'realm or state in which fairies have their being' and which 'contains many things beside 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', or any other such implications of the wondrous storicity of it, then they will need to seek non-enchanting referents.[99] Mirrlees' or Dunsany's fairies, for example, would need to be given a symbolic or metaphorical meaning – psychological representations, social commentary through surreal dreamlike and abstract forms.

Indeed, this kind of 'one-to-one symbolic correspondences in MYTH, FABLES AND ALLEGORIES', particularly popular in literary scholarship and criticism, 'led to a widespread tendency to read any symbolic fantasy as allegory', which as Westfahl points out, was something authors like MacDonald and Tolkien frequently complained about, precisely because it strips the fantasy narrative of any 'realistic motives' in favour of 'symbolic necessities'.[100] Instead, readers who hypertextually recognize and utilize the pre-textual metatext the genre carries, both historical and present, from the reader's standpoint, are able to complete the metafictive dialogue. For instance, Lord Aubrey is, said Neil Gaiman in his introduction to the 2000 edition of *Lud*, 'not such a great step […] to Oberon', the Fairy King in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the reader might not be familiar

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[99] Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', p. 113.
[100] Gary Westfahl, 'Symbols and Symbolism', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 917; 'Surrealism', in *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. by Gary Westfahl (Westport: CN, Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 774.

with Shakespeare's play or the fairy lore he inspired and transformed.[101] The

hypertextual connection is not made, although the intertextual connection is evident.

At the same time, non-intended connections between text B and text C instead of

text A, as Genette puts it, are not of lesser worth. The reader can thus establish

hypertextual connections between *Lud-in-the-Mist* and fairytales, Perrault, the

Brothers Grimm, MacDonald, lore or any previous texts and narratives, At the same

time, they can form connections to C.S. Lewis's Narnia, Tolkien's Middle Earth

tales, Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* (1968), and even late twentieth-

century/early twenty-first-century writers like Cornelia Funke's *Inkheart* series

(2003-2008), Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* books (2001-2012), Holly Black's

Spiderwick (2003-2009) and Neil Gaiman's works, simply because those could be

part of the reader's pre-texts and their hypotext.

No fantasy narrative, therefore, exists in a vacuum, but neither does it exist in an

unconscious inactive web. Instead, it is, through its transtextual connections, in

conscious metafictive confabulation with the readers. Fantasy 'draws upon

contemporary ideas about sign systems and the indeterminacy of meaning and at the

same time recaptures the vitality and freedom of nonmimetic traditional forms such

as epic, folktale, romance and myth'.[102] If this is what fantasy does, then that implies

that the reader must be reacting in such a way as to recognize, or be familiar with the

sign systems being used as well as the traditional forms. Fantasy's vast amount of

taproots and its application of modern thinking and perspectives, i.e., the awareness

of the impossibility of the fantastic events, enable a fantasy text to have an almost

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[101] Neil Gaiman, 'Introduction', in *Lud-in-the-Mist*, by Hope Mirrlees, p. viii.
[102] Attebery, 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula', pp. 293-94.

limitless hypertextual range. At the same time it is limited in the sense that the reader's hypotext must contain some of those taproots. Moreover, the reader is prompted to acknowledge the doubleness derived from the acceptance of 'the impossibility of the fiction' and 'the reality of the fiction'.

Traditional realist fiction mimics reality or at the very least, the socioculturally accepted views of the actual world. While the events need not have happened in 'real life', the reader accepts that they could have happened in the actual world as they know it. When events become implausible, a narrative's pretensions to mimic reality is broken. With fantasy, however, the narrative stance is not plausibility but simultaneous impossibility and possibility. Fantasy is not so different from mimetic fiction in that it still requires the reader to accept that the events told could happen if such and such parameters, rules, worlds, etc., existed. The difference is that the recognition of 'impossibility' is still invariably present, and needs to be present in order for the fantasy to be a fantasy and possess wonder. Thanks to hypertextual connections, to the reader's knowledge and familiarity with superstition, myth, legend, fairy tales, and other 'fantastic' narratives, they are provided with both dichotomous perspectives. The reader simultaneously recognizes, through the connection, that the elements they are encountering are familiar; they know how the fantastic works – that it involves elements and things that did not happen or do not exist – and can therefore be delighted when the author changes and transforms these familiar elements, these taproots and pre-texts, into a new story. That sense of recognition grants the reader their sense of reality, but their equal recognition of the wonder and impossibility in the nature of those sources, as well as against their own physical reality, completes the doubleness. As Attebery concludes, 'recovery' –

Tolkien's restoration of familiar objects to 'the vividness with which we first saw them – 'requires the combination of the familiar and the impossible within the context of an affirming, reordering narrative', offering 'the possibility of generating not merely a meaning but an awareness of and a pattern for meaningfulness [which is what] we call wonder.'[103]

David Sandner puts it best when he argues that:

> Fantasy had a way of offering everything and nothing, new worlds and old, openings and closings, glimpses beyond the world and only the abyss. And this is not a binary, but a tension at the core of the fantastic that is productive for the literature, and, importantly here, for its criticism, provoking debates about the function of the form that bring us to the edge of meaning itself.[104]

Fantasy narrates the strange and impossible, suggesting codes and messages and simultaneously subverting them. In the tension produced 'between the realistic and imaginary', argues Sandner, 'fantasy literature defines itself as the modern literature of nostalgia and the impossible'.[105] That tension is mildly relieved in the reader thanks to the hypertextual connections they are able to establish. These connections give them a harness or anchor to 'a reality'; a reality where they know they are familiar with the story, to some extent. They are familiar with the operation of Fantasyland, or Fairyland, or Elfland, and can enter, interpret and interact with it comfortably, and thereby also enjoy the transformation taking place. When they make connections to it, uniting the text with others externally and using those texts to inform the narrative, the reader is actively engaging in the reading process, in the

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[103] Attebery, p. 309.
[104] Sandner, p. 282.
[105] Sandner, p. 286.

writer-reader contract, and is being made aware of narrative structures such as the 'storicity' of the fantasy, its quality of Story and inter-, extra-, and trans-connectivity to the metatext that comprises and encompasses the genre.

Reconciling Reader Response with Author Intent

The situation that emerges from the reader response, which is not only exclusive to fantasy but inevitably part of it, is that the genre appears to prescribe specific interpretations of itself. As the study on intertextuality and metafiction indicated, as well as fantasy's various tentative definitions, the genre draws from specific fantastic-like sources (many as they may be), and behaves in certain ways in order to produce specific frames of mind and responses. This suggests that the reader's response cannot entirely overshadow or diverge too greatly from the author's intent or from the overarching reactions induced by fantasy's pre-texts.

These responses and intents, nonetheless, are not so much tied to the pre-texts themselves as much as they are connected to the very dynamic of metafictive awareness itself. Failure to recognize, for example, Calvino's playful self-referencing as precisely that – the baring of the form, the blatant pointing to itself and saying 'fiction' (i.e. constructed work) would result in confusion for the reader. Similarly, in fantasy, failure to recognize the text as fantasy – as a text which points to itself and its taproots and says 'story' (i.e., a constructed work situated within a pre-textual metatext) would result in meaning-making conflicts. Some critical writers believe that the weight of intertextual connections should fall on the shoulders of the author (Murgatroyd), while others consider the reader's

participation and interpretation to be just as, if not more, important (Barthes and Rosenblatt). The importance of a balance between each transtextual connection on the narrative is particularly significant in fantasy precisely because the writer-reader contract is so vital. The author's intent informs the narrative and the reader's response decodes the narrative; without both the fantasy narrative would become senseless or incomprehensible. Limitations on the reader's interpretative freedom are thus imposed. Granted, ultimately the reader is free to approach and interpret any given text in whichever way they see fit, and indeed if their pre-text familiarity and knowledge is limited, they will be unable to understand and interact with the narrative in its intended way, but it should be understood and acknowledged that fantasy, because of its content and history, requires a restriction of the reader's freedom. Essentially, referencing elements that are already part of the 'collective unconscious', or that must be interpreted in a specific manner in order to for the message to be conveyed, take away part of the writer's and reader's interpretative freedom.

On the argument of the reader's freedom to intertextual interpretations, one interesting suggestion appears in Worton and Still's analysis of French writer and philosopher Montaigne. Montaigne, according to Worton and Still, argues that an author's conscious and purposeful references (particularly via the inclusion of text in italics or inverted commas) '[signal] a repetition and a ceding of authorial copyright'.[106] A similar conclusion can be garnered from Murgatroyd's notions of intentional intertextuality. For him, the author's intent is established when they use 'clear and substantial indicators, such as significant verbal similarities, repetition of

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[106] Worton and Still, p. 10.

words in the same place […], close links in context and clustering of common details and motifs'.[107] Though he is referring to epic poetry, specifically Ovid's intertextual referencing of Virgil having '[picked] up Virgilian words, phrases, lines, passages, characters, episodes, and books constantly and often with extended allusion', similar correspondences can be drawn between fiction (and in this case fantasy fiction) and its metafictionally accessed intertextual taproots.[108] The presence of these succeeds in ceding authorial copyright, as Worton and Still put it, because it actively points to another text, source, and/or creator other than the author's own (as in Murgatroyd's example of Ovid). In other words, the text no longer belongs to the author for they are placing it, via references, on a larger context. This is surprisingly accurate for the genre of fantasy as in situating a narrative within the fantasy metatext – invoking the application of a taproot with which to decode the text – an author in a way cedes part of their ownership of the tale.

For example, it was common practice for H.P. Lovecraft to make references to not merely external texts, but to texts and characters within other external texts, for the purposes of establishing, through intertextual connections, a sense of a deeper mythology. In his gothic fantasy 'The Whisperer in the Darkness' (1931) there are references to the 'Lake of Hali', the 'Yellow Sign', and Hastur, which come from Robert W. Chambers' 'The Yellow Sign' (1895), and throughout stories like 'The Haunter of the Dark' (1935) and 'The Shadow Out of Time' (1936) Lovecraft references Robert Bloch's fictional grimoire *De Vermis Mysteriis* from 'The Shambler from the Stars' (1935). Likewise, Manly Wade Wellman's 'When It Was

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[107] Murgatroyd, p. 99.
[108] Murgatroyd, p. 99.

Moonlight' intertextually references Edgar Allan Poe by being written in his style, voice, and echoing phrases from his stories (particularly ones regarding live burials like 'Cask of Amontillado'). In more traditional fantasy (i.e., not the supernatural gothic), similar forms of intentional authorial ceding can be seen through the usage of pre-textual motifs, conventions, characters, or places in order to situate the narrative within a context beyond the tale itself. Referencing of folkloric and mythological components (for instance, when Poul Anderson references Thor, Freyr, Odin and the Aesir from Nordic mythology in *The Broken Sword*) implies sources (even when not specific textual sources) that are not the author's or the narrative's. The fantasy story is fueled by this ceding because it plays at speaking of things more ancient (and thereby fantastically mystical, supernatural, unknown, or uncertain) than the author or the story being told in order to produce its sense of wonder.

In addition, the reader, through their hypertextual linkages, also takes away part of the author's ownership and, consciously or not, grants it to their hypotext. For example, the dark elves (or drows) in the *Dungeons & Dragons* games and books might be hypertextually connected (and thus, the reader's perceptions regarding the ownership of 'dark elves' are externalized) to those in the *Warhammer* series instead of the reverse. Moreover, the reader is also allowed to own and transform such texts, because it is their response that gives them meaning. Even when there is no explicit allusion made through the use of italics or inverted commas, the transtextual connections that tie the text to another previous text (to texts that belong to neither the writer nor reader) could be seen to 'impose' a particular interpretation. This '[pointing to] an obligatory intertext' deliberately tells the reader that the text originates in an outside text, and therefore it 'restricts the reader's free, aleatory

intertextual reading of the text'.[109] However, as Worton and Still also suggest, 'reading is an aggressive participation', and the reader 'inescapably strives to incorporate the quotation into the unified textuality which makes of the text a semiotic unit'.[110] The reader thus incorporates the quotation or reference and its implied intertextuality into the overall interpretation and significance of the different intertextual readings, utilizing their own hypertextual connections alongside the author's intent.

The importance of analysing both intertextual and hypertextual connections is that modern fantasy relies on both aspects, both extremes, to exist. The connections made to pre-texts are not solely mediated by the reader's awareness and their experience, yet the author's intended and inevitable pre-texts are not, and cannot be, divorced from the reader's awareness either, precisely because fantasy is a genre that deals with 'the impossible'. Those 'impossible' elements and the accurate understanding of what those impossible elements mean and how they work, require the reader to know their meaning. In fantasy, a balance is maintained between the two through their metafictional/extra-textual (or metatextual) agreement. On one hand, regardless of whether post-structuralist 'death of the author' notions are valid or not, while the author's intention is there, the inability to detect them on part of the reader does not necessarily inhibit them from establishing other hypertextual connections. On the other hand, if fantasy deals primarily with the impossible, and if one of its main concerns is to produce the feeling of wonder and marvel, then the reader's hypertext must contain some fantastic-like texts – whatever they might be – from Fantasy's vast repertoire of pre-texts, in order to apply their structures in the

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[109] Murgatroyd, pp. 10-11.
[110] Murgatroyd, p. 11.

'decoding of meaning' of the Fantasy narrative. The writer, influenced by their pre-texts, cannot help constructing the fantasy world with at least some minimal connections, be it direct or subtle references, to fantasy's taproots. The reader then utilizes their own stock of previous texts, – the knowledge, experience, and most importantly the 'approach' and feelings derived from those texts – and applies them to the narrative. In order for fantasy's sense of hesitation, enchantment, and wonder to take place, the writer and the reader's transtextual connections (which give them context and meaning) must coincide to some degree with each other's and with the genre's, and it is at the metafictive level that this relationship occurs.

Section 4: Subversion

Modern fantasy's metafictional form and structure is evidenced by the similarities in origin, dependence on its pre-texts and its meta connections to those pre-texts, both from the writer and the reader. All of these characteristics converge to reveal yet another metafiction quality of the genre: its subversiveness. Metafiction and, by extension, fantasy, undermine fiction from within by virtue of being forms that systematically overthrow and undermine the established, or at least expected, parameters between fiction and the actual outside world and employing theories and awareness of their own narrative elements in order to deconstruct and subsequently reconstruct fiction. Fantasy, which Rosemary Jackson names a literature of subversion, breaks the barriers of fiction by its expected requirements from both reader and writer, as well as from its dependence on its pre-texts. In addition, its very 'story-shaped world' structure, as Clute calls it, subverts fiction by revealing

that very structure – that a fantasy narrative depicts a world constructed and shaped of story.[111] It informs the reader that this structure is in place by breaking it.

Taking into consideration that fantasy is dependent on its various transtextual connections for content and meaning, its taproots could then be considered a form of 'rules'. Even in the loosest sense, not calling the structures of myth, legend, lore, and fairytales the rules by which fantasy abides but merely regarding them as 'founding stories' that guide or inform fantasy narratives, those pre-texts are still being overturned and transformed into new fictions. As seen, fantasy and metafiction's transtextual connections, like Genette and even Kristeva argue, not only tie the narrative to previous narratives, but transforms those previous narratives hypertextually. Subversion, similarly, seeks to destroy, or using Waugh's words for metafiction, 'deconstruct' an established thing and transform it (transpose, following Kristeva) into something new that nonetheless will inevitably have connections and resemblances to its deconstructed precursors precisely because of its responsive quality.

On this Jackson argues that it is not about 'inventing another non-human world', although invention is aspired for, but the inversion of:

> [Elements of] this world […] recombining its constitutive features [the pre-texts that are historically part of the actual world] in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently 'new', absolutely 'other' and different. [112]

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[111] Clute derives this from Brian Wicker's book *The Story-Shaped World: Fiction and Metaphysics: Some Variations on a Theme* (London: Athlone Press, 1975).

[112] Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p. 8.

These still bear enough resemblance to those percussive features as to strike the reader with a sense of familiarity and timelessness. Fantasy's subversion, however, is deeper than merely transforming its taproots, though that is also an important characteristic of its metafictional nature. Of more significance is its double reality, or rather, its acknowledged impossibility and simultaneous accepted reality in tandem with its subversion of the 'story-shaped' world, as both are acts of subversion or destruction/reconstruction. On the former, it is worth mentioning W.R. Irwin in particular, who characterised fantasy as 'anti-real', defining it as 'a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into "fact" itself'.[113] As established in the introduction, fantasy as a modern genre has had countless attempts at definition, and many theorists tend to ultimately agree with Tolkien's perspective in 'On Fairy Stories' that '[achieving definition] cannot be done. *Faerie* cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible'.[114] The most agreed upon descriptor, more so than Todorov's 'marvellous' or even Tolkien's 'arresting strangeness' or 'enchantment', is 'impossible'.[115]

As Attebery states, 'fantasy is not about things that have not, but could not happen'. A wizard with magical powers cannot exist in the actual world – this is the implication made by fantasy. Genres like magic realism, surrealism or absurdism demand other readings: a wizard with magical powers that can exist in the actual world because the actual world is more tenuous and mysterious than normally

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[113] W.R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 4.
[114] Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', p. 114.
[115] See this thesis' Introduction.

assumed would be magic realism; one that exists so that truths or concepts about the actual world can be approached symbolically might be surreal or absurdist. In a fantasy narrative, however, the point is that it is impossible in relation to the reader's actual world. As vague as this descriptor – the impossible – is, it is useful for drawing parallels between fantasy and metafiction because the use and nature of 'the impossible' in the narrative and the required following acceptance of that impossible, as Irwin says, into 'fact itself', is a subversion that encourages explorations about the 'fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text' and the 'reality which is fiction'.[116] Jackson describes this as a 'violation of dominant assumptions which threatens to subvert (overturn, upset, undermine) rules and conventions taken to be normative', either that fiction is an illusory self-contained construct, or that fiction relates either directly or symbolically to reality.[117] Jackson begins her study by addressing that 'indefinable' quality of fantasy, positing that it is its association with imagination and desire that makes it difficult to define, although it is precisely this quality that also gives it value, and is another tie to metafiction.[118]

Subversion, Metafiction and Fantasy

Metafiction's subversion of reality and fiction through the challenging of conventions of fiction, reality and their borders is one of its best and most distinctive qualities. The importance of both unreality and reality in conjunctions with their perception has been one of the main topics of concern in the study of the fantastic and reality, always connected with the reader's perception of it. Borges explores this

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[116] Waugh, p. 1; Scholes, p. 8.
[117] Jackson, p. 14.
[118] Jackson, p. 1.

constantly in stories like 'The Circular Ruins' and 'The Other', the latter which will be looked at closer later, but because of its content, fantasy is always engaging with this form of subversion, always calling to attention fictionality and unreality. Some fantasies, particularly portal and intrusive ones, to follow Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics*, are more obvious about this disparity between what the reader would perceive as 'impossible' or 'fantastic' than in immersive fantasies. In portal fantasies, the characters, and therefore the reader, cross from a world which is comparable to the agreed upon actual world to a world where the same values do not apply. This secondary world can be fantastic to varying degrees, but it always contains some 'marvellous', 'wondrous', or 'impossible' conditions that separate it from reality, baffle and/or surprise the characters, and which ultimately (and ideally), instil wonder in the reader: Dorothy, for example, wakes up after the twister, exits the battered house and finds herself surrounded by 'the queerest people she had ever seen,' in a landscape of 'strange and beautiful sights'.[119] Not only this, but she encounters witches, talking scarecrows, tin-men and lions and a slew of magical items.

Similarly, Lucy enters Narnia and meets Mr. Tumnus the faun under the light of a lamppost in the middle of an enchanted winter forest, and though not always classed under 'fantasy' by all literary theorists because of its dream-framing, Alice falls down the rabbit-hole, tumbles into a strange room where foodstuffs affect one's height before stepping fully into the aptly named world of Wonderland, where even stranger things proceed to happen to her. In all of these, the fantasy world visited, willingly or otherwise by the protagonists is purposefully different from the real

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[119] Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, p. 9.

world, with the purpose being to instil marvel and wonder. Even in immersive fantasies, where all of the plot takes place in a fantasy setting without any prompting or mention of the actual world, the reader still remains aware, perhaps even more so, of the disparity and impossibility between their reality and the narrative's. The dark elf (drow) Drizzt Do'Urden from the Forgotten Realms novels, Elric the albino ruler of Melnibóne, the high-fantasy world of Prydain, the quest-fantasy landscape of Fritz Lieber's Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser or the sf/fantasy world of L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, to mention a small fraction, are all undeniably 'impossible' from the perspective of the reader's actual world, and more importantly, are presented as such.

Subversion here emerges from the disparity between what 'must be acknowledged' and what 'must be accepted', for it is not merely that the reader hesitates at the moment they encounter the fantastic and then proceeds to view it as the uncanny (where the strange and unusual is explainable) or the marvellous (where it is accepted as supernatural), as Todorov had posited. Instead, in order to experience the marvellous or wonderful, a form of mental 'doubleness' needs to take place. The reader needs to accept the possibility and plausibility of an enchanted winter world of fauns and talking animals that can be accessed through the back-panel of an old wardrobe. That is not to say that the reader accepts this as a possibility in the 'real world', but that its point is that though it is not possible, it must be possible for it to make sense. Here lies one of the key differences between fantasy and traditional realist fiction; in the latter, the events taking place are regarded as theoretically possible in the actual world as much as in the world of the fiction, while fantasy is

not possible in the actual world, but is so within fiction, thus making its fictionality obvious.

The acceptance of the impossible as possible, of the fantasy as fact, is only logically achieved when preceded by an acknowledgement of the fantasy itself. The acceptance of the known 'impossible' requires an awareness that it is impossible. The reader is therefore simultaneously aware of the overarching reality of the world – that the fantasy is in contradiction with the real world – and aware of the internal reality of the fiction – that the fantasy is not in contradiction. It might be argued that, ultimately, the reader's goal is to suspend their disbelief, that is, to ignore the fact that the fantasy is not real. However, this would imply that the reader fully accepts the fantasy as any other realist fiction, and that they step out of the feeling of wonder. If one of fantasy's intents, as a genre and individually each narrative, is to produce a sense of wonder and marvel (which incidentally Jackson criticizes), then the reader cannot entirely exit the position where they are aware of the fantasy narrative's impossibility and unreality. Their awareness must then be held simultaneously for that is what gives fantasy its reason for existing.

This is supported by the fact that fantasy draws its origins from stories, narratives and beliefs that were perceived as less implausible in their respective periods than they would have been after the eighteenth century, approximately. Alternatively, Jackson describes the genre not as 'impossible,' but as the 'literature of 'unreality', emphasizing that fantasy, as a literature, has 'altered in character […] in accordance with changing notions of what exactly constitutes "reality"'.[120]

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[120] Jackson, p. 4.

In his essay 'The Fantastic Imagination', George MacDonald posits his ideas about the development of fantasy, or rather 'Imagination'. Reality for MacDonald is synonymous with 'laws', which in turn might be compared with the definition of subversion and 'rules':

> The natural world has its laws, and no man must interfere with them in the way of presentment any more than in the way of use; but they themselves may suggest laws of other kinds, and man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws […][121]

The actual world, in essence, has a set of acknowledged facts by which people experience and perceive it. The facts of the reality of a fiction are no less 'untrue', as long as they are 'held' by the inventor, in the process of the creation, adds MacDonald. 'When such forms [creations] are new embodiments of old truths, we call them products of the Imagination,' i.e., things that are no longer regarded as truths.[122] 'Imagination' implies both a creative endeavour and an embodiment of wonder, particularly given the connections MacDonald later makes to Fairyland. 'Old truths', equally, have a similarity to the concept of taproots, the feelings of timelessness and wonder those taproots possess, and their purpose as 'building blocks' of law (or deconstructed/reconstructed 'rules') for the new Imaginative creations.

The use of the word 'Imagination' can possibly be replaced with 'Fantasy' itself, although the use of it, especially coupled with its counterpart 'Fancy', derive from

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[121] MacDonald, 'The Fantastic Imagination', p. 5.
[122] MacDonald, p. 5.

Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. Jackson, on her part, employs Fancy interchangeably with Fantasy given that Coleridge describes it as 'a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and place, blended with and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word *choice*'. [123] Despite MacDonald's dismissal of Fancy as mere invention, contrary to a product of Imagination which embodies old truths in new forms, Fancy still is associated with memory, according to Coleridge's descriptions. This – memory – as well as 'old truths' that come from old stories and pre-texts, are all contained within Fantasy. The genre 're-combines and inverts the real' – memory, laws, rules, pre-texts – into new narratives, subverting through it the self-contained reality of fiction, thereby subverting reality as well. [124]

The 'real' is therefore both the actual world and the real experience and perception of the taproots. That said, fantasy's very nature, 'the impossibility [that] defines the fantastic as a narrative', requires the reader to *know* it is impossible in relation to the actual world, but that it is nonetheless 'familiar' in relation to older narratives as well as true within the story itself. Here fantasy behaves in the same subversive manner as metafiction, for the latter also necessitates this doubleness of thought, this double approach, on part of the reader. The caveat should be made, however, that while Jackson's argument concerning fantasy and subversion is useful and applicable in this discussion because it identifies what is an inherent contract or contradiction in fantasy's nature, it is inaccurate in other aspects.

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[123] Jackson, p. 20; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 167
[124] Jackson, p. 20.

Jackson's argument depends too closely on Todorov, and she follows his structuralist argument without updating her sources to fit with how fantasy is evolving, and was evolving even in 1981. As such, she has the tendency to outright dismiss texts which fall under Todorov's category of the marvellous as being superfluous and too transcendent (centred on mystical aspects and fairy lore, etc.), and preferring instead to analyse those texts which fall more strictly under his heading of the 'uncanny'.

Jackson expands on Todorov saying that 'the tale which introduces "strange" events permits no internal explanation of the strangeness – the protagonist cannot understand what is going on – and this confusion spreads outwards to affect the reader in similar ways'.[125] This leads Jackson to dismiss the literal narrative meanings, i.e., the narrative at face value, in, for instance, the *Alice* books in favour of solely symbolic readings. As such, she can find neither humour nor joy in the narrative itself nor a purpose in the nonsense language.[126] Thus, she can only take comfort in psychoanalytical readings of identity, loss of control, and sexuality, for she considers Carroll's 'pleasures of signs and language games' to be 'empty'.[127]

Because Jackson is also outrightly dismissing the marvellous, she fails to explore key modern fantasy texts which would contradict this belief that the more strange and seemingly disassociated a tale is from 'the real world', the more unexplainable it is. She ignores writers like Mirrlees and Dunsany, barely acknowledges MacDonald and Carroll, and basically dismisses the later modern fantasies of Lewis and Tolkien, the latter who has been identified as what readers think of as 'quintessential' fantasy,

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[125] Jackson, p. 27.
[126] Jackson, p. 142.
[127] Jackson, p. 143.

as well as the entire fantasy megatext of the second half of the twentieth century.[128]

For Jackson, Tolkien's brand of fantasy is more accurately described as nostalgic romance, concerned, she derides, with a 'backward' vision removed from present material conditions', i.e., she bemoans the fact that it is not engaging in allegorical and symbolic dialogues with the present world.[129] She instead focuses on writers like Dostoevsky and Kafka, whose works are at most marginal fantastic realism.

Her examples, such as Cazotte's *Le diable amoureux* (1772) and James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) can, at best, be called marginal early fantasies, precisely because, as she says, they '[make] it impossible for the reader to arrive at a definitive version of truth'.[130] Only in the murkier modern fantasies and metafantasies is the reader forced to wonder whether or not the fantasy is taken as true or not.[131] There is no doubt in *Phantastes* that Anodos steps into Fairyland (as demonstrated by the ending and the numerous reassurances Anodos makes of his reality; a fact that Jackson ignores in favour of moral readings), or that Elfland exists in Lord Dunsany's book. Alice might have experienced Wonderland in a dream, yet the reader does not entirely doubt the 'wonderment' and fantasticness of the tale.

For Jackson, of the 'popular Victorian fantasies' she cites – Carroll, MacDonald and Kingsley – Carroll's the 'most clearly fantastic' because '[it draws] attention to problems of signification, presenting a confused, topsy-turvy world which lays no

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[128] Attebery, 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula', pp. 305-307. 'Megatext' as in the large body of texts branded fantasy, and not 'metatext', wherein the transtextual connections between fantasy are contained continuously.
[129] Jackson, p. 164.
[130] Jackson, p. 17.
[131] Understandable of metafantasies, as fantasy is their subject.

claim to re-present absolute meaning or "reality"'.[132] The problem with this statement is that it takes away relevancy and veracity to her other examples and to other fantasies because she associates meaning solely with a mirror representation of 'the real world' instead of with any other world construct and then proceeds to ignore the fact that fantasy still mirrors the 'real world' through its usage of pre-texts. She undermines the fantasy landscape that takes as its standpoint the world of Faerie, or at least the alien world of wonder and marvel that draws its history on ancient myths, legends, lore and fairytales from 'the real world'. This means that she not only minimalizes the impact of and importance of nineteenth century fantasy texts, but it means she also ignores the larger portion of modern fantasy in the twentieth century, discarding them as belonging to 'that realm of fantasy which is more properly defined as faery [sic] or romance literature'.[133]

Because Jackson dismisses these, seeing only Kafka, Dostoevsky, and Dickens (bizarrely) as the upholders of Todorov's theories, she fails to realise that these texts in modern genre fantasy are engaged, often more complexly, in the same metafictive subversions she reserves for only Borges, Barthelme, and Vonnegut. She positions Dostoevsky, Dickens, and Kafka as 'literature of the double' that sets up 'an internal dialogue between "real" and "unreal", "self" and "other", whereas modern metafictions are set apart, taking pleasure in their manifest unreality', without realising that these metafictions are in blatant dialogue about the real and unreal precisely because they bare and take pleasure in baring their unreality (their actual status). Thus, Jackson is unable to draw similar parallels with the genre of fantasy,

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[132] Jackson, p. 141.
[133] Jackson, p. 9.

relegating the term solely to those uncanny texts that reject the validity of their internal realities in favour of symbolic correspondences to the actual present world.

In truth, the more fantasy narratives move into the twentieth century and writers produce more and more immersive fantasies (which Jackson dismisses as mere escapist fiction), the more the reader needs to acknowledge the 'veracity' (and correspondences between real and unreal) of the story. Therein lies fantasy's subversive power; in the truth in the fantasy. It is not that the fantasy is explainable or can be explained and justified in terms of the actual world, but that it is simultaneously real and unreal; real in narrative terms, and unreal in outside terms, and that divergence, or rather doubleness, *is* fantasy. The meaning Jackson is searching for is always there in fantasy, but in order to find it, as Prince says when discussing metafiction and metanarratives, the message (meaning in this case 'the narrative', and here 'fantasy') needs to be decoded utilizing the metanarrative, here acknowledged to be the pre-texts and taproots.

Jackson says that there is a 'gap' between sign and meaning 'which has become a dominant concern of modernism' and which is exemplified in fantasy. The fact is that there is no gap, because the pre-text is the gap between the sign and the meaning. The meaning is that the feeling of wonder can be produced because the reader is familiar with the meaning and implications of mythological beings, supernatural fairy creatures, or fantastic landscapes had in past stories, in lore and fairytale, or in legends and the like, and even though they know (consciously, subconsciously) that these things are not true, they understand the feeling of wonder

associated with them. This enables them to approach the fantasy tale with the correct mindset.

Doubleness – Subversion through the Impossible

Borges stories like his 'The Circular Ruins', 'The Other', and even the short story 'Borges and I' illustrate how the double mindset subversion occurs in metafiction and fantasy. In 'The Circular Ruins' , the story is metafictive because it poses questions about the differences between reality and dreams, theories about consciousness, and existence, and then turns them on their head with the revelation at the end, demonstrating that the story itself is an act of the story that was being told. The theory takes form in practice and subverts itself, and thus reality as well. But the subversion is not merely the 'folding back on itself', but its extension to the reader as well as what it requires and produces in the reader's mind.

The story is not fantasy, primarily, although it might be considered fantastic. Even under Todorovian parameters, its focus is neither the uncanny nor the marvellous exactly, although it does place the reader in a state of hesitation. Hesitation is produced because in order for the revelation at the end to be significant, the reader needs to simultaneously accept that because it is impossible for a dream to gain consciousness, it is impossible for the man to be a dream and recognize that he is a dream, yet at the same time it must be possible and the man *is* a dream and he *has* become aware of his reality. This doubleness, the fact that the man in the story realizes that he himself is a story, and the fact that his realization that he is a story is part of the Story makes it metafictional. It establishes a question regarding what

dreams are, what consciousness is, what Story itself is capable of doing. The reader

accepts the two contradictory notions as possible, an act that might even be

something akin to George Orwell's infamous 'doublethink', the act of holding two

contradictory beliefs as true, but without the social implications of that text.

In 'The Other', the character of 'Borges', who may or may not be the author

himself, meets his younger self on a park bench. Depending on the perspective, it

can also be said to be a story of young Borges meeting his older future self, even

though the story is narrated from the older Borges' point of view. This older version

nonetheless admits that it might be he who is the dream of the younger and not the

other way around. Neither believes that the other is entirely real, each believing the

other to be a dream, or themselves to be the dreamt object. Neither is under the

impression that it is a ghostly visitation, apparition, omen, or any other supernatural

fantastic product. Whether the Borges-characters are meant to be taken as direct

representations of the author himself, or whether Borges named the character after

himself to make the story more subversive is beside the point; the reader recognises

what's going on –the flip or inversion of reality. The two selfsame writers, one

young one old, wondering which one is the dream of the other is subversive.

Through the story, Borges (and the reader) is able to comment on the uncertainty of

reality, as well as take pleasure in the metafictive game of playfully inverting the

reality of fiction with the fiction of reality.

Because fantasy narratives tend to take place in an uncertain realm, be it that of

Faerie, Fairyland, an original immersive world, or something vaguer and closer in

appearance to the real world (i.e., whichever form of 'Fantasyland', as Diana Wynne

Jones puts it in the *Tough Guide*, the author chooses), they always require this

doubleness.[134] It always, necessarily, deals with the impossible, and despite some

critics' dismissal of the 'high fantasies' (which tend to be immersive, although many

portal/quest fantasies also contain high fantasy elements), the more fantasy-heavy a

narrative is, and the more elements from fantasy's pre-texts it incorporates, alludes

to, references, intertextually and hypertextually, the more subversive it becomes. In

MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858), the main character Anodos awakens in Fairyland

after he is promised passage into that realm by his fairy grandmother. The young

man, only turned twenty one that very day, is astonished at his incursions into the

lands of Faerie, yet his attitude is not one of horror and fear for his sanity, but one of

wonder, eagerness, and even slight recognition. When he meets the tiny fairy

woman, who says is his grandmother, Anodos takes it all in his stride. He remarks

on his surprise and does not act against it but along it:

> It was only afterwards, however, that I took notice of her [the fairy woman's]
> dress, although my surprise was by no means of so overpowering a degree as
> such an apparition might naturally be expected to excite. Seeing, however, as
> I suppose, some astonishment in my countenance, she came forward within a
> yard of me, and said, in a voice that strangely recalled a sensation of twilight,
> and reedy river banks, and a low wind, even in this deathly room:—
>
> "Anodos, you never saw such a little creature before, did you?"
>
> "No," said I; "and indeed I hardly believe I do now."
>
> "Ah! that is always the way with you men; you believe nothing the first time;
> and it is foolish enough to let mere repetition convince you of what you

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[134] Diana Wynne Jones, *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (London: Gollancz, 1996).

consider in itself unbelievable. I am not going to argue with you, however, but to grant you a wish."[135]

His wish is to go into Fairyland, and the narrative presents the reader with fairies, with the astonishment and subsequent acceptance of the protagonist, with the actual passage into Faerie, and with the notion of 'realness' as opposed to 'fairytale'. By making mention of fairytales, the narrative assures that the reader's awareness is activated, 'in tune' as it were, with fairytales and lore, yet it simultaneously inverts their awareness by telling the reader that it is not like a fairytale because it is actually 'real'. Despite this, in order to have a relationship or link to the story, the reader must remain aware of their familiarity with fairytales; this connection (transtextual) is what decodes the message (the narrative). Gerard Prince's self-referentiality in metalanguage and metanarratives is applicable here once more, and it indicates why Jackson's argument regarding 'meaning' and its place in fantasy is not entirely accurate.

In metafiction and fantasy, by subverting the boundaries between fiction and reality, the narrative forces the reader to adopt a doubleness of thought. The impossible becomes possible thanks to the pre-text serving as context for decoding the message. However the reader does not move entirely to an acceptance of the impossible as possible, even within the context of the story, because the feeling produced by the fantasy is one of wonder and amazement. The meaning given by the pre-texts also explains this, as the reader 'copies' or incorporates be it their feelings toward the various pre-texts or their awareness of the feelings/behaviours/intentions of those pre-texts unto the fantasy narrative. The fantasy reader is thereby capable of

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[135] MacDonald, *Phantastes*, p. 7.

experiencing the sense of wonder brought about by the impossible because it is impossible, and approaching the narrative as any other narrative because it is also entirely possible. Fantasy does not lack meaning, but it depends so intrinsically on its pre-texts in order to give it meaning as to be an inherent quality or a fundamental feature, and it requires a subversion of the boundaries of fiction and reality, of the possible and possible, and thus a double-awareness in the reader, in order to function.

Subversion through a story-shaped world

The second subversive, and thereby metafictive, act that Fantasy is capable of doing comes from its most commonly used structure: that of story-shaped worlds, or rather story-shaped narratives. One of the characteristics of Fantasy that Clute identifies and even distinguishes from other forms of the fantastic is its dual self-coherency and transparency of Story. Both are tied to one another, and both are indicative of fantasy's 'metaness'. It is also a form of subversion. As Clute explains it:

> Stories are traditionally transparent: they do not conceal the fact that something is being told, *and then* something else, *and then* we reach the end.[136]

Clute expands, using Brian Wicker's *A Story-Shaped World* (1975) as an example, that Story transparency is particularly typical of fantasy:

> We may say that the characters in fairytales [to which it is possible to add characters in Fantasy {Clute's addition}] are 'good to think with'... [and that]

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[136] John Clute, '"Fantasy" from *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997)', in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Sandner, pp. 310-315 (p. 312).

the job of the fairytale is to show that Why? Questions cannot be answered except in one way: by telling stories. The story does not contain the answer, it is the answer.

Clute concludes by stating that 'Fantasy is a way to tell stories about the fantastic'.[137] It is perhaps fantasy's construction and dependence on its taproots and its 'impossible' subject that necessitates this story-shaped structure. As a product of its taproots, it is also a product of the 'storytelling' structures – oral tradition, story/clubhouse/campfire settings, the journal, and travel narratives – that suggest a 'tale being told' or a 'story of a story'. While modern fantasy has and is continuing to evolve, seeking to and capable of adopting different modes and structures, many of the most popular and recognizable fantasy texts utilize very obvious 'story-shape' constructions, or respond to these. C.S. Lewis' beginning to *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, for example, which Mendlesohn cites as an example of the writer setting the portal fantasy structure, begins with 'Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy. This story is about something that happened to them when they were sent away from London during the war because of the airraids'.[138] The narrator's voice constantly interrupts the narrative, reminding the reader that it is a Story, especially when Lewis foreshadows the plot as commenting 'that was how the adventures began'.[139]

This structure is not exclusive to fantasies aimed at children. Tolkien employed it to some extent when claiming that the events in *The Lord of the Rings* came from *The Red Book of Westmarch*. Even when there is no direct mention of the narrator and/or

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[137] Clute, p. 313
[138] C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 9.
[139] Lewis, p. 11.

of the Story, any story about the fantastic still implies a Story being told. The narrator's presence is implied, mostly by the fact that a large percentage of narratives (in particular Fantasies) are told in third-person omniscient or first person as 'past events', and the reader's presence is also assumed in that someone must do the reading. The awareness on some level of Story is equally noticeable. It breaks the illusion of fiction by informing the reader that it is a story, and that its being a story is the point all along.

Fantasy's 'story-shaped world' structure is also not unique to the genre, as Wicker suggests. His argument is that 'every tale implies a teller,' even if it does not imply an author.[140] Wicker concedes that it is possible that not all narratives behave this way, allowing for any tales which might not share these characteristics. He also specifies that his study's focus is traditional narratives, particularly those that derive from oral traditions and epic narratives. However, the fact that his primary examples for his argument are Old Testament and other religious narratives supports Clute's claim that Fantasy in particular (whose taproots include the Bible and other religious/supernatural texts) employs and embodies the story-shaped world structure. Through content – impossibility, however slight or specific – and its subject – the fantastic, however limited the metatext employed is – fantasy texts reveal their construction, their story-ness.

When discussing portal fantasies, Mendlesohn mentions Mindy Klasky's *The Glasswright's Apprentice* (2000), and uses it as an example of the way portal

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[140] Wicker, *The Story-Shaped World*, p. 101.

fantasies are 'fully narrativized'.[141] The idea is synonymous with Clute's 'story-shaped world', which Mendlesohn points out later on as well. 'What should be already known to us, the context of the world, is delivered as memory, and more specifically, as story'.[142] Here Mendlesohn is paraphrasing Samuel R. Delany's critical work *About Writing* where he states, similarly to Clute, that: 'We *live* our lives in chronological order. When we *remember* them, however, our mental movement is almost entirely associational', that is, that experiencing the world is sequential, and that story-shaped worlds tell the reader what they already know to be true – that it is a story.[143] Mendlesohn continues, arguing that:

> [T]he single direction of information works instead to indicate the status-within-the-story of the speaker. To steal yet again Clute's idea of "making storyable," I note that these reveries make storyable character and characteristics. Indeed, reverie and self-contemplation, far from creating depth, break the sense of immersion in a society, and are fundamentally antithetical to either character development or an immersive structure. It is a false mimesis that reminds us that we are in a narrated text and that *the protagonist's version must be true*. To doubt the validity of the reverie would be to destroy the impermeable nature of the club discourse: either the reverie is "true" or the entire structure collapses.[144]

Mendlesohn rightly identifies this structure in fantasy; however a counter argument can be made against Mendlesohn's judgment of it as 'fundamentally antithetical'. While it can be agreed that making 'storyable' and reminding the reader that they are reading a story would appear to be breaking the structure of the club tale (the tale

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[141] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 10.
[142] Mendlesohn, p. 10.
[143] Samuel R. Delany, *About Writing: Seven Essays, Four Letters and Five Interviews* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), p. 42.
[144] Mendlesohn, p. 10.

being told to the reader), this apparent contradiction does not necessarily imply a collapse of the entire structure. In fact, if, as Clute says, fantasy's natural form is the 'story-shaped world', and the reader is aware, via the transtextual connections that must be made, that it is a story, in great part because references to other stories – to taproots the reader knows to be stories and to be impossible – break the illusion of the self-contained narrative and reveal Story, then the realization of the storyability of the narrative does not collapse the structure. It is part of the structure; the contradiction – doubting the validity of the reverie and also accepting it as true – is the structure and thus it cannot collapse. This can be contrasted with Todorov's hesitation in that it resembles the duality before the fantastic encounter where the reader accepts that they are either 'the victim of the illusion of the senses' (the uncanny) or 'that the event has taken place, is an integral part of reality, but in a reality controlled by unknown laws' (the marvellous).[145] However, as addressed in the introduction, this implies the reader then steps out of the hesitatory moment – out of the fantastic. Instead, as demonstrated by fantasy's metafictional self-revealing structure, the relationship between the reader and the fantastic in fantasy is not so much one of hesitation but a dynamic of doubling contradiction. Where Todorov's hesitation results in one of two outcomes, recognition of fantasy's metafictive storyability shows that the genre is predicated on a sustained doubling.

Mark Currie also makes statements about the way in which metafiction bares the structure of the Story. In his introduction to *Metafiction*, he states that the writer is an 'inhabitant of Literatureland, the place where texts and acts of interpretation constitute the world of experience which the novelist knowingly or unknowingly,

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[145] Todorov, p. 25.

represents'.[146] Fantasy tells stories about fantasy, and the structures of fantasy, its elements, its predecessors, the writer's and reader's perceptions, and the inevitable doubleness its contradictions produce, form and enable the reading of the fantasy narrative. Fantasy narratives are, therefore, only accurately approached through metafictional means, blatantly or subtly operating, but always inevitably present.

Ultimately, after all the comparisons made between metafiction and fantasy's use of transtextual connections, their interactions with the reader (including the author/reader contract), and the overall subversion of reality, the genre's metafictiveness can be best summed up by Waugh's assessment of metafiction:

> Any text that draws the reader's attention to its process of construction by frustrating his or her conventional expectations of meaning and closure problematizes more or less explicitly the ways in which narrative codes – whether 'literary' or 'social' – artificially construct apparently 'real' and imaginary worlds in the terms of particular ideologies while presenting these as transparently 'natural' and 'eternal'.[147]

The intent of a fantasy writer, excepting those who arguably write allegorically, metaphorically or symbolically (or indeed, surrealistically or abstractly) is to write a story about something or which contains something impossible, that has not and cannot exist in the actual world. Fantasy, as Waugh says of metafiction, creates a fiction and makes a statement about the creation of fiction, by being about imagination and the act of imagining fantastic landscapes. The statement being made is that it is impossible and that it is possible, and that this is why it is wondrous. Each new fantasy enacts a criticism on its own form, of the genre, of its metatext,

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[146] Currie, p. 3
[147] Waugh, p. 22.

and of the reader's regards and conceptions of it, by reinterpreting the boundaries of fantastic imagination into new creations.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this chapter, questions regarding intentionality were raised, as well as questions regarding the manner in which a fantasy narrative's metafictionality is expressed through various modes that bare its status as a fiction. Intertextuality, hypertextuality, and subversion have been used to demonstrate how each fantasy text is necessarily metafictive because it is situated within a transformative metatext that reflects fiction-making. Though the reader's cognitive doubleness, and their playful acceptance of the conflicts between fantasy's impossibility and possibility as well as their interactions with the taproots have been addressed, it might still be tempting to regard fantasy as a mostly subconscious kind of metafiction, especially when compared to those metafictions where the narrative voice blatantly addresses the reader or openly declares itself a fiction (as seen through the examples of Borges or Calvino).

It is therefore necessary to examine this apparently blatant dynamic in order to conclude this chapter and bring together all of fantasy's metafictive qualities. Metafiction's breaking of the narrative boundaries through the (intentional) narrator's voice addressing the (conscious) reader or the reader's level in order to draw attention to both fiction and reality is a storytelling tool that readers have been trained to use and slowly grow aware of, since childhood; it is a way of inciting the reader to conspire with the author in the creation of the story. By breaching the

narrative levels, the fictionality of the tale is made apparent because the narrator's voice is assuming an air of truth, reality, and verisimilitude that the reader is under no compulsion to be tricked by. When a story (even a traditionally realist tale) addresses the reader, it ascribes a false level of realist reassurance. Since the reader exists in the actual world, the acknowledgement of that reality serves as a blatant pretence by which to situate the story in more real contexts that, in actuality, reveals the 'constructionality' of that story. Addressing the reader is essentially the story claiming that it is real, a 'realness' which is subverted by its very acknowledgment.

It is difficult to identify this subversion in texts, especially fantasy, aimed explicitly at children (see the aforementioned examples from Collodi and CS Lewis in this chapter), but those texts that are either targeted solely at adults or for any type of reader, that employ this addressing to the reader are unmistakingly subverting what is regarded as 'real'. The children's program that asks for audience participation, for example, makes the characters more real for the children watching them because it ties them to their sense and concept of 'reality'. Developmentally, however, they learn that the characters are, of course, not real; subsequent encounters with fiction which addresses the reader therefore operate as metafictive subversions of the coherency of narrative and the integrity of reality. When H. Rider Haggard, Daniel Defoe, or Edgar Rice Burroughs, to mention but a small sample, address the reader or make claims about the truth and factuality of their stories, they are in fact solidifying its status as a constructed object. Fantasy stories can, naturally, also employ this direct baring too, though it is because of its object and not merely its blatant storytelling mode that fantasies breach narrative via narrative voice. This occurs because of two reasons: 1. the taproots, and 2. the genre's intentional

impossibility and unreality. In the first place, fantasy's dependency on its taproots, varied as they might be, means that they possess an inherent signalling, not merely to external narratives (which makes them metafictional already) but to the idea of 'story'. Be it to heroic and medieval epic narratives, lore, legend or specific texts like Shakespeare, Spenser or the Grimms, fantasy's usage of tropes, styles, elements, characters and settings from these taproots convey connotations of story. To this is added the genre's fundamental feature: the impossible. This is not the subjectively impossible or improbable, or the allegorically/symbolically impossible but the intentionally unreal.

Herein lies the genre's narrative voice's metafictive baring: that the impossible and the unreal are presented as possibilities, utilizing the same language as that of realist fiction. Anodos' reassurances to himself that the events he is experiencing are real and not a dream, the emphasis of the character's absence from the real world, and the first-person-perspective account structure in *Phantastes* are like those of a fiction that narrates the entirely possible events of a fictional character's life, only the events, characters, and places in *Phantastes* are blatantly and knowingly impossible, that is, their point is to be fantastic. Where, narratively, Carroll's Wonderland is only a dream, Narnia, Middle-Earth, Melniboné, Hyboria, Earthsea, and most forms of Fantasyland (be they on Earth or in completely immersive fantasies) are depicted as narratively real – as fictionally real as a fictional town in a traditional realist story, - though they are not attempting to convince the reader that they truly are possible places within the actual world.

This is on par with a fiction narrative addressing the reader and parodically saying 'this is real' (as with Haggard's 'It is a curious thing that […] I should find myself taking up a pen to try to write a history' in *King Solomon's Mines*) ; it shatters the illusion and bares the truth: that it is a fiction (which raises questions, as Scholes would put it, about the relationship between fiction and reality, and is in accordance to Waugh's definition of metafiction whereby fiction names itself – *theorizes about itself* – as it makes itself – *through its practice*).[148] The fantasy narrative, by being told like realist fiction though the reader understands that it is not, is also metafictionally shattering the separations of the real and the imaginary. The very device, whether used explicitly or not, of 'once upon a time' that contributes to the 'story-shaped world', performs this by simultaneously placing the story within a fictitious real but ancient past (consider also the discussion on authorial ceding in section three).[149] This is compounded further by the fact that this metafictive state, this doubling awareness or recognition, is necessary for the sustaining of a successful fantasy. In other words, fantasy narratives are in a constant state of self-referentiality and self-revelation; they do not and cannot hide the ultimate truth – that they are fantasies, that they are fictions, that their worlds are stories and are composed of story(ies), and that that is why they are wondrous.

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[148] Other examples of this device can be seen in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (London: Penguin Books, 2003) when Huck says: 'That book [*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*] was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly' (p. 49), or Edgar Rice Boroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes* (London, Penguin Books, 2008): 'I had this story from one who had no business to tell it to me, or to any other' (p. 1).

[149] Brian Stableford calls this a 'deep-rootedness' that 'gives fantasy literature its unique qualities and utilities, both culturally and psychologically' (*The A to Z of Fantasy Literature* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), p. xl).

Chapter 2: Metafantasy and Neil Gaiman

Section 1: Introduction to Metafantasy

This study into the literary theories of fantasy and metafiction has revealed that fantasy – as the recognizable modern genre that developed between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and began to be critically studied from the twentieth century onwards – shares the form, structure, and most importantly function and operation of metafiction. By calling attention to its own construction, to the concepts of fiction, to the vagueness of reality and imagination, and by forcing the reader to contemplate these thoughts, while still experiencing a fictional story, metafiction, as its etymology suggests, 'goes beyond' fiction. The narrative extends past its fiction borders, either exhibiting an awareness of the storytelling process itself or inviting the reader to be aware of the selfsame process.

Fantasy, as seen, operates similarly. It is evident that a 'story-shape', as John Clute puts it, coupled with the doubleness of 'the possible impossible', places the reader in a state of awareness of 'fiction'. In addition, fantasy texts demand – or at least invite – the reader to partake in the creative process because it is the reader's awareness (however tenuous and vague) of the taproots and their condition, that enables them to instil and be instilled by wonder. Fantasy, be it through its structure, dynamic or hypertextual components, requires the reader's participation and their recognition of the reality of the form as a fantasy story.

The first step in this participation is the reader's sense of familiarity about the texts; they are able to recognize fantastic elements such as magic, magical creatures, heroes and villains, tropes about good and evil, fantastic settings, because they have encountered or experienced them before as part of the collective unconscious. These fantastic elements, however, are not used in the same manner as they would in fantasy's taproots, i.e. they serve a different purpose in fantasy. Originally, they might be said to serve moralistic purposes: lessons or cautionary tales; or they can be myths and superstitions that were once taken to be true. Fantasy, as the defined genre it is now, does not strive necessarily toward these same goals in its use of those recognizably fantastic elements, and the fantasy reader is aware of this. Instead, the fantasy narrative fulfils the purpose of producing a sense of wonder and marvel at the acknowledged impossibility of the narratives.[1]

Hence, Fantasy deconstructs the elements, forms, and modes of older fantasy texts and remakes them into Fantasy just as metafiction deconstructs and reconstructs fiction in turn. This subversive or deconstructive action is, as shown, inescapable in fantasy, for each fantasy derives some sense of its wonder from a previous source, and it requires the reader's awareness of the source and the change. This is not to say that fantasy narratives require critical knowledge of specific texts in order for them to be relevant and understandable to the reader, for most of fantasy's taproots are sources that are deeply embedded in the collective unconscious (fairytales, legends). On the contrary, the content of a fantasy narrative, particularly early

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[1] It should be noted here that fantasy, as many other fantastic genres, can also function as a kind of thought experiment, where the reader is able to experience and explore different human behaviors, tendencies, impulses, and motivations is various extreme or unusual environments and situations. Intentionally abstract, allegorical, or estranging 'fantasies' that do not respond to the genre's taproots are engaged in a different dynamic, though still a metafictive one, to that of narratives written for the sake of fantasy and fantasy stories. Moreover, these fantasies can still become part of metafantasy's response to 'fantasy as taproot'.

fantasies such as those of MacDonald, Dunsany, Mirrlees, Baum, or Barrie, is assumed to be understandable on this level to most contemporary Western readers.

The notion, nonetheless, does raise the issue of familiarity with the taproots in order to comprehend and relate to the genre – the more specialist a genre becomes, the less accessible it is to readers outside the 'reading circle' – and it appears to account for and hint at the distinction between early fantasy and more contemporary fantasy. As fantasy emerges and expands throughout the nineteenth and mostly the twentieth centuries, its taproots begin to include, not only those pretexts from myth, fairytale and superstition, but fantasy texts themselves. The genre begins to influence the genre, as texts are produced, not to allude to Greco-Roman mythology, Arthurian tales, Edmund Spenser, Thomas Malory, William Shakespeare, fairytales, lore, but to the fantasy of George MacDonald (1858-1905), Lewis Carroll (1865-1871), L. Frank Baum (1900-1919), James M. Barrie (1902-1937), and later Lord Dunsany (1905-1957), H.P. Lovecraft (1917-1937), Hope Mirrlees (1926) and J.R.R. Tolkien in particular (1937-1967).[2] As new texts and subgenres are identified and defined (frequently by market trends), their tropes and styles become more and more recognizable to fantasy readers; sword and sorcery, epic fantasy, urban fantasy, high fantasy, all provide the genre with a variety of structures and forms, not to mention identifiable character and setting archetypes.

The need for awareness in the reader, which as seen is intrinsically tied to fantasy, then becomes doubled, like in a mirror. Alternatively, the image of 'levels of reality' often associated with metafiction can also be employed here as the fantasy narrative

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[2] Dates correspond to the writer's major fantasy narratives till, in most cases, the author's death.

reaches or ascends to further levels of 'metaness', becoming a deconstruction of a deconstruction. In the first analogy, fantasy can be seen functioning as a mirror, if slightly distorted, which projects back to the reader a number of transtextual sources and levels of awareness, now changed but still recognizable, which the reader must acknowledge. When fantasy narratives begin to use the genre as a transtextual source it is as though a mirror has been placed in front of the first one in such a way that the first one still reflects fantasy's taproots, but the second one now projects a new image, not quite fantasy's taproots and not quite fantasy either. If the metaphor of the two mirrors was extended and taken to its logical conclusion, the genre of fantasy is then, in many ways, infinite, or at least possesses the capacity to continue evolving and growing, like a pair of mirrors reflecting each other infinitely.

The second analogy is equally interesting, as it implies that fantasy and reality can be reduced to planes and levels which can then be stacked upon one another. Indeed, when analysing metafiction and all aspects of transtextuality, levels of reality and fiction are often the most appropriate way of describing the meta-process. In fantasy, the levels are chronal and spatial in that one level represents the taproots which stretch backwards through time, one is the narrative – which might in turn hold internal levels of reality and fiction – and another is the reader's awareness – which contains their awareness of actual reality, of the fiction as fiction, and of their hypertextual connections. It is not merely that these levels exist outside of the narrative and that the external viewer, detached from the story, can identify them, but that they are all bound within and made explicit by the narrative and its form. Mirrlees' *Lud-in-the-Mist*, for example, contains within itself, because of its 'story-shape', the level of story (where the narrative takes place), the level of pre-texts

(where the narrative [or the genre] exhibits an awareness of its own taproots, of the concepts of storytelling and the fantastic), and the level where the reader experiences their doubling consciousness (the acceptance of both the reality and unreality of the fantasy narrative).

Whether represented as a doubling of thought or as levels of awareness, the fact remains that the genre of fantasy is noticeably moving toward a hyper awareness of fantasy, as exemplified as early as 1968 with Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn*, and in the 1970s with Roger Zelazny's *Chronicles of Amber* series, Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*, William Goldman's *The Princess Bride*, or Stephen R. Donaldson's *Thomas Covenant* series.[3] As fantasy has already been identified as sharing the characteristics of metafiction, the proposed term 'metafantasy' can be applied to this form of fantasy which exhibits awareness of the structures, tropes, characters, forms, etc. of modern fantasy. This term also conforms to both analogies – that of the mirror and that of the levels – and can be applied to any of the above mentioned texts. For example, *The Neverending Story* can be seen as either sets of doubling mirrors, where fantasy's taproots are echoed and distorted in Fantastica – the fantasy setting – and which are then re-doubled by the awareness of the fact that Fantastica is also a story, or as levels of story/reality, where one level represents fantasy's taproots, another level represents Fantastica and another level represents the awareness of fantasy as a genre. In the case of Ende's novel, the use of fantasy as its own taproot is evident; fantasy and its form becomes the source material that is then subverted and transformed. A more subtle metafantasy occurs in Donaldson's

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[3] Peter S. Beagle, *The Last Unicorn* (New York: Viking, 1968); Roger Zelazny, *The Great Book of Amber: The Complete Amber Chronicles, 1-10* (New York: Avon Books, 1999); Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Stuttgard: Thienemann Verlag, 1979); William Goldman, *The Princess Bride* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973); Stephen R. Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).

Lord Foul's Bane where the main character, an author, is transported from the real world to a high fantasy setting, recognizable as such by both him and the reader.

Metafantasy therefore, is not used to refer to fantasy which behaves metafictionally, for as it has already been established, all fantasy functions in this manner. Instead, metafantasy refers to fantasy which has become a metafiction of fantasy – a metafiction of a metafiction. The purpose for this distinction, between fantasy and metafantasy, is that it accounts for the changes and growth of the genre, from the increase in fantasy pastiches to 'trends' like the New Wave Fabulists presented in 2002's Conjunctions: 39.[4] Fantasy is not only drawing its structure and form from myth, legend or lore pre-texts, but is beginning to draw from fantasy itself, i.e. from the tropes, structures, forms, characters, images, etc., from fantasy narratives. This is most noticeable in writers such as Neil Gaiman, Terry Pratchett, Diana Wynne Jones, James A. Owen, China Miéville, Catherynne M. Valente, and Jo Walton, among others, who are engaging in an active subversion of the genre of fantasy and not of myth, legend and folklore, necessarily. However, there are several ways, direct and indirect, blatant and subtle, in which fantasy can be recognized as becoming metafantasy, and which will be delineated briefly in this section before being explored in depth, particularly through the use of Neil Gaiman's works, in the final section of this chapter and throughout Chapter Three.

What is metafantasy?

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[4] *The New Wave Fabulists*, ed. by Bradford Morrow and Peter Straub, Conjunctions Series, 39 (New York: Bard College, 2002).

The term 'metafantasy' appears in only a handful of articles from the 1980s and in a recent article from 2012 by Neil Easterbrook, beginning with R.E. Foust in an article for *Extrapolation* (1980). In it Foust explores Peter Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* describing it as 'metafantasy', basing his analysis on the concept of metafiction. His explanation of what he considers metafantasy to be is similar to the concepts proposed in this study regarding fantasy as a genre which engages in metafiction. He defines metafantasy as fiction which '[uses] devices of obvious artifice to reify the reader's always tenuous sense of the fabulous. Its artifice thus mythologizes the barren world of fact upon which, however, fantasy relies for its effect'.[5]

Describing *The Last Unicorn*, Foust identifies the 'reversal of reversals' in the narrative, which keeps fluctuating the reader between the acceptance of the reality of the fantasy and yet calling attention to its 'fictionality' by addressing elements from outside of the narrative:

> This to-and-fro dialectical movement – acceptance of and entry into the text, transformative encounter and return to the extra-fictive historical moment – constitutes the most characteristic structural feature of Beagle's meta-fantasy.[6]

In addition, he concludes that 'Beagle's language, then, is highly anachronistic, alliterative, synaesthetic, onomatopoeic, metaphoric, and metonymic', indicating that it is this structure (or rather constant inversion or transformation of structures) that makes the novel metafantasy.[7] Foust's description of the novel, as well as his

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[5] R.E. Foust, 'Fabulous Paradigm', *Extrapolation*, 1 (1980), 5-20 (p. 9).
[6] Foust, p. 10.
[7] Foust, pp. 12-13.

overall statement that fantasy, as a genre, 'indicates an area of creative possibility that contemporary fiction is exploring [as well as an area that] has an ethical dimension lacking in other contemporary forms [which is] "worthy to be written for and read by adults"', implies that his usage of the term 'metafantasy' is the same as the one used in Chapter One.[8] For him, metafantasy means 'metafictional fantasy', which as seen, is a quality inherent to all fantasy.

George Aichele, in 1988, also utilises 'metafantasy' in an article exploring both Beagle's novel and Phillip K. Dick's *Man in the High Castle*. Following Foust, Aichele proposes the use of the term as a fantastic subgenre that describes 'one of the ways in which fantasy subverts any defantasizing strategy'.[9] He explains that:

> [Metafantasy] establishes two or more worlds, each a distorted image of the other, but unlike other fantasies, it allows no escape from one to the other; instead it establishes an endless oscillation between worlds, a reciprocal interface with one another which becomes more and more violent until a blurring of every self-identical entity occurs.[10]

Like Foust, Aichele also analyses the 'metaness' of Beagle's novel, arguing that:

> The ironic play of traditional fairy tale and nontraditional elements raises fundamental questions about the metaphysics of narrative, and therefore also about the reader's primary world. This oscillation and fusion of opposed worlds distinguishes metafantasy as a subgenre and makes it more

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[8] Foust, p. 6. At the end of this quote Foust cites Tolkien's essay 'On Fairy Stories' from *Tree and Leaf*, p. 45.
[9] George Aichele, 'Two Forms of Metafantasy', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 3 (1988), 55-67 (p. 56).
[10] Aichele, p. 56.

thoroughly and explicitly antimetaphysical and antigeneric than other forms of fantasy.[11]

The confusion over fantasy being metafiction and 'fantasy metafiction' is evident with Aichele's comparison between metafiction and his usage of metafantasy:

> When fiction admits to its own fictionality it becomes what Scholes calls metafiction (pp. 3-4), […]. When fantasy admits its own fictionality, its own fantasticality, it becomes metafantasy.[12]

Indeed, when fantasy admits its own fictionality it becomes 'meta', however, as shown, fantasy always exists, in this state of admission and awareness, because of the nature of its 'impossibility' and allusion to its transtext. This is why the term 'metafantasy' should be separated from the idea that fantasy behaves as or is metafiction. Because fantasy always admits its condition of 'being a story', to call fantasy 'metafantasy' is redundant and misleading; it is sufficient to say that fantasy operates in the same way as metafiction. Metafantasy, then, can be used to describe the more recent trend in fantasy to be aware of its condition as 'modern fantasy' – i.e., as genre – and not merely an awareness of its fictionality.

There are three more articles which have used the term 'metafantasy' that should therefore also be mentioned here. First is a review by Michael Tolley in 1986 which uses the term in relation to a short story called 'Oo-a-deen'.[13] Tolley does not define the term, but instead merely comments on metafiction, which '[he] is told signifies a

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[11] Aichele, p. 60.
[12] Aichele, p. 64.
[13] 'Oo-a-deen' is a 1847 short story written by an anonymous author, first published in the *Corio Chronicle and Western Districts Advertiser* on Oct 2, 1847. [Internet Speculative Fiction Database < http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?94903> Accessed 30 November 2012]

text in the form of a fiction which is about the form of that fiction'.[14] Moreover, he does not explain in which way the story is either metafictive or metafantastic, therefore it must be assumed that his usage of the term is merely to describe a text which is fantasy and metafiction.

The second comes from an article by Stanislaw Lem, where he uses the term in his title: 'Metafantasía: The Possibilities of Science Fiction'. He does not directly define or explain what he means by it, though his knowledge or at least awareness of the connotation of the term (in relation to metafiction) is evident in context. The article discusses the course science fiction might and should take by contrasting it to various experimental and anti-novel texts from the period. The manner in which Lem describes these texts is essentially describing metafiction, identifying the restructuring of older narrative structures into new possibilities for literature, the importance of resemblance and how it must be 'evident to the reader', as well as the manner in which even 'indirect description or allusion' guides the 'reconstruction efforts of the reader's imagination':[15]

> Every description of a situation taken from the repertoire of culturally known situations invokes the repertoire of possible issues appropriate for it, and these issues are what the reader will anticipate. Within the framework of this structured anticipation, she or he will make his or her decisions by following directions given by the text, even when they are few or barely present.[16]

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[14] Michael J. Tolley, 'Oo-A-Deen: An Early Australian Metafantasy', *Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Literature*, 22 (1986), 7-10 (p. 7).
[15] Stanislaw Lem, 'Metafantasía: the possibilities of sf', *Science Fiction Studies*, 8 (1981), 54-71 (pp. 61, 63, 66).
[16] Lem, pp. 66-67.

Despite the fact that Lem does not use 'metafantasy' in the actual article, or even define a specific theoretical framework for his analysis, the connections between what he is describing and metafiction are evident, and are therefore derivable and applicable to fantasy and metafantasy. Finally, in 2012 Neil Easterbrook published an article titled 'The Shamelessly Fictive: Mimesis and Metafantasy' in which he explores the films *MirrorMask* by Dave McKean and Neil Gaiman, and *Pan's Labyrinth* by Guillermo del Toro. Easterbrook uses metafantasy with little to no distinction between fantasy as a metafictive genre and fantasy that responds metafictively to the genre of fantasy. Following Donald E. Morse's 'Commit a Public Service and Teach Fantasy' essay, Easterbrook acknowledges that fantasy issues an 'uncannily double challenge – its simultaneous distance from shared empirical reality and its imperative to rethink that shared empirical reality – that makes it paradigmatic of the aesthetic impulse and of the very value of art in social life'.[17] This is essentially recognizing the genre's metafictiveness – its purposeful turning away from reality and its inevitable connection (via its contradictory impossibility and transtextuality) to reality, challenging the reader about their regards for fiction. Easterbrook does, however, hit upon some of the characteristics of metafantasy. He comments how both films utilise traditional fantasies and fairytales that are foregrounded in the 'common archetypes of Western myth', yet play and ultimately subvert the viewer's expectations regarding genre.[18]

In other words, 'fantasy is shamelessly fictive', it 'flaunts fictiveness' as well as recognize that fantasies about fantasy are 'metafantasies' that interact with, not merely according to the way fantasy interacts with its own traditions within its

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[17] Neil Easterbrook, 'The Shamelessly Fictive: Mimesis and Metafantasy', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 18 (2012), 193-211 (pp. 193-194).
[18] Easterbrook, p. 197.

internal narrative, but how it interacts with 'the reality of the viewer's fantasy'.[19] As

he states, 'the film [*Pan's Labyrinth*] is obsessed with references to other fantasies

or fantastic traditions [that have] resonances for those initiated in the fantasy

megatext'.[20] Here, metafantasy will only be used for those texts that can be

determined and argued to be performing this latter function – of referencing a

metatext of fantasy, not merely one comprised of its fantastic traditions, but the

genre itself.

Despite this descriptor, the lack of more criticism which directly uses the term

(especially under these parameters) means that this study must be conducted on a

basis of first source analysis, although critical material such as that from the New

Wave Fabulists, as well as some of Farah Mendlesohn's work on *Rhetorics of*

Fantasy (in particular the section on liminal fantasy) will be invaluable to the

identification of this fantastic meta-metafiction. Other recent publications, such as

Aalborg University's collection *Marvellous Fantasy*, will also be useful in

determining how contemporary fantasy critics and theorists are interacting with and

studying the genre's evolution. Nonetheless, as said, this study will focus on primary

sources, specifically the works of Neil Gaiman, as the main evidence to the

existence, manifestation, structure and function of metafantasy.

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[19] Easterbrook, pp. 201, 203.
[20] Easterbrook, p. 206. This is more accurate as 'metatext', unless he really means 'scope'.

Section 2: Basis for Practical Study

Identifying and Defining Metafantasy in Practice

Gaiman's fantasy is an ideal case study because his fiction exemplifies the concept of self-aware fantasy not only through the immense amount of myth-mixing, the uncountable references and allusions to fantasy narratives, and the constant commentary, questioning and philosophising about the boundaries between fantasy and reality, but also through the complex and diverse ways in which he achieves these aspects. Neil Gaiman has been described by several critics and writers as a 'master myth-maker', 'one of the brightest names in horror and fantasy writing today', both 'a myth and a legendary figure in Fantasy circles' and 'a kind of modern muse', and 'perhaps the premier imaginative storyteller of our time'.[21] Publishing his first professional short story in 1984 ('Featherquest'), he began to garner critical attention with his first graphic novel *Violent Cases* (1987), a collaboration with illustrator Dave McKean that intertwined mazes of references within the story and pulled in iconography from outside the actual storyline.[22] This tendency to interconnect references from outside the story in conjunction to what could essentially be described as a revelling in the dynamic play between different levels of fiction and reality, is one of the defining characteristics of *The Sandman*

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[21] Kristine Larsen, 'Through a Telescope Backwards: Tripping the Light Fantastic in the Gaiman Universe', in *The Mythological Dimensions of Neil Gaiman*, ed. by Anthony S. Burdge, Jessica Burke, and Kristine Larsen (Crawfordville, FL: Kitsune Books, 2012), p. 188; Ben P. Indick, 'Neil Gaiman in Words and Pictures', in *The Neil Gaiman Reader*, ed. by Darrell Schweitzer (Rockville, MD: Wildside Press, LLC, 2007), p. 79; Matthew Dow Smith, 'Foreword – The Muse in the Black Leather Jacket: A Kind of Introduction', in *The Mythological Dimensions of Neil Gaiman*, ed. by Anthony S. Burdge, Jessica Burke, and Kristine Larsen, p. 12; Darrell Schweitzer, ed., *The Neil Gaiman Reader*, pp. 7-8.
[22] JaNell Golden, 'Pay Attention: There May or May Not Be a Man Behind the Curtain: An Analysis of Neil Gaiman & Dave McKean's *Violent Cases*', in *The Neil Gaiman Reader*, ed. by Darrell Schweitzer, p. 99.

(1989-1996) – Gaiman's most oft-analysed work – as well as of his later novels.[23]

As he has described, all stories are intertwined like webs in which a person (authors and readers) becomes entangled, and it is through this concern that he exposes the construct and structure of story, i.e. fiction, by adopting a visible stance of 'storyteller' or story weaver.[24] In his essay 'An Autopsy of Storytelling', Chris Dowd draws a comparison between Morpheus' (titular the Sandman) function, which is to 'tell stories', and what Gaiman does, which is '[telling] stories about telling stories':

> His fictional worlds are populated by writers, film directors, puppet masters, actors, oral storytellers, and even a king of stories who rules a realm of fictions, fables, and dreams.[25]

Gaiman not only uses fantasy to tell stories, he uses stories to tell fantasy, or rather, he uses narrative structures (story-shaped narratives) to tell stories about the landscape of fantasy (which, by being metafictional always reveal their own fictionality) in order to expose the narrative structure of Story (the metanarrative) and reinforce its importance.

There are several contemporary fantasy writers (from novels to comic books), like Terry Pratchett, Alan Moore, Diana Wynne Jones, China Miéville, George R.R. Martin, Eoin Colfer, Susanna Clarke, James A. Owen, etc. who also toy with or directly use metafantasy and its forms. Pratchett's *Discworld* novels in particular are

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[23] Of the four critical and pseudo-critical books on Gaiman (the above mentioned, and *Philosophy and Neil Gaiman* and *Neil Gaiman in the 21ˢᵗ Century*), containing sixty-five essays between them, 26 percent of them are either directly about *The Sandman* or extensively use it their argument, compared to the second most discussed text, *American Gods*, at 16 percent.

[24] Neil Gaiman, *Anansi Boys* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2005), pp. 54, 357.

[25] Chris Dowd, 'An Autopsy of Storytelling: Metafiction and Neil Gaiman', in *The Neil Gaiman Reader*, ed. by Darrell Schweitzer, pp. 103-114 (p. 103).

firmly set in a metafantasy structure, as the works actively and intentionally allude to modern fantasy (in particular High Fantasy narratives, too numerous to mention, as well as other genres and mediums) by parodying their tropes and recognizable elements. Parody, which will be discussed ahead in this chapter, is a significant component and identifier of metafiction, so parody used to subvert an already subversive genre serves as an indicator of metafantasy. Jones similarly makes use of fantasy parody as well as pastiche, (another indicator of metafiction and hence metafantasy as well that will be discussed in Chapter Three) in many of her works (significantly in *The Dark Lord of Derkholm*). Meanwhile Miéville's narratives either actively seek to portray worlds that are as different from traditional modern fantasy as possible (such as the Bas-Lag series), or adapt familiar fantasy and myth elements into 'weird fiction' and 'urban fantasy' settings.[26] Others like Martin, Clarke, or even Mervyn Peake, who was decades ahead of his time, raise questions about what distinguishes the genre by employing very few fantastic elements and/or constructing narratives that lean heavily on pseudo-history and politics. In this way, instead of being metafantasy (or possessing certain metafantasy characteristics) by being extremely referential to the genre or by attempting to portray a fantasy that does not employ recognizable genre tropes, these texts call to attention the very nature of the fantastic by resembling the genre, so that a reader recognizes it as such, while at the same time containing little that is fantastic or focusing on the mundane instead of the fantastic.

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[26] See Miéville's *King Rat*, an urban fantasy that features a half-human half-rat protagonist, the spider king Anansi and the Pied Piper of Hamelin; *The Tain*, 'a story which uses the tropes of the fantastic to address the real world's injustices' featuring imagos and vampires. (Graham Sleight, '*The Tain* by China Miéville Review', in *InfinityPlus.com* < http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/nonfiction/tain.htm>; *Un Lun Dun*, a YA fantasy about a secret fantastic world underneath London similar to Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and Gaiman's *Neverwhere*; and *Kraken*, 'a dark comedy about a squid-worshipping cult and the end of the world' (Miéville, 'China Miéville: My new book takes the idea of the quid cult very seriously', in *Metro* < http://metro.co.uk/2010/06/02/ china-mieville-my-new-book-takes-the-idea-of-the-squid-cult-very-seriously-350880/>.

Gaiman, however, is more appropriate and advantageous for a study of this kind because he employs these and other structures across the wide scope of his works. The majority of his oeuvre is both fantastic (specifically fantasy and horror) and self-reflective, 'explicitly describing the storytelling process and blurring the boundaries of text and reality'.[27] It explores fantasy and its evolution from the perspective of fairytales, lore (English or otherwise), legend, myth (various cultures), early modern fantasy (Carroll, Mirrlees, Dunsany, James Branch Cabell, G.K. Chesterton, Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, etc.) and later modern fantasy (Michael Moorcock, Fritz Leiber, T.H. White, Anne McCaffrey, Beagle, Ursula Le Guin, Zelazny, etc.) in mostly contemporary settings. The range of his references is extensive and complex, and he uses parody, pastiche, fantasy-resemblance, allusion (to the author, story and reader), fantasy-omission, fairytale settings, urban settings, suburban settings, dreamscapes, and most importantly the interaction between multiple levels of fantasy and reality to construct his fiction.[28] The fact that he appears to do this intentionally and directly in most of his narratives must also be taken into consideration. For example, his overall use of myth, most noticeable in *The Sandman*, and in his novels *Good Omens* (with Terry Pratchett) and *American Gods*, takes the form of *myth-mixing* in order 'to see […] how many myths could one, metaphorically, get into a phone booth, or get to dance on the head of a pin'.[29] Commenting on the writing process for the *Season of Mists* issues, he has expounded further how he:

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27 Sándor Klapcsik, 'Neil Gaiman's Irony, Liminal Fantasies, and Fairy Tale Adaptations', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 14 (2008) 317-334 (342).
28 "It is almost harder to discover what he *hasn't* read" (Schweitzer, 19)
29 Gaiman, 'Reflections on Myth', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 31 (1999), 75-84 (p. 78).

[W]ondered how many things you could get on the stage at the same time and have people believe what you're doing. Can you have the Norse gods and the Egyptian gods on the stage at the same time? Yep! That works! No problem there! How about Chaos and Order from the old DC comics? Yep, that works! Ok, what about fairies? If I put on fairies, is the whole thing going to fall apart? No, that's still working! Angels! Angels is going to bring the whole structure down! No, it's still standing, and we've got angels in it. And it was very interesting. I realized that suspension of disbelief is much harder to pop sometimes than you would imagine, if you do things with a certain amount of respect.[30]

Indeed, his treatment of fantasy as a genre is reverential and playful, which enables him to imbue his narratives with an air of familiarity and nostalgia for fantasy so that readers feel that that they are reading 'a story [they] haven't heard before, but once it's done it should feel like a story [they've] known all [their] life'.[31] In interviews and articles he has expressed his views regarding myth and fairytales, in particular, their power and importance in modern storytelling, revealing a metafictive regard for the genre in the way he described it:

[T]he *fantastique* offers a road-map – a guide to the territory of the imagination, for it is the function of imaginative literature to show us the world we know, but from a different direction.[32]

Gaiman's fiction achieves this and more; as his stories resemble or allude to fantasy, and as his characters react with an awareness of fantasy, his narratives show the 'world we know' as well as the 'fantasy world we know'. He acknowledges the origin of fantasy, and he approaches their 'recombination' into fantasy as an active,

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[30] Gaiman, interviewed by Lawrence Person, 'Gaiman, Interrupted: An Interview With Neil Gaiman', *Nova Express*, 3, (2000) 1-10 (p. 6).
[31] Gaiman, interviewed by Nick Stechfield, 'Faerie Tales', *SFX*, 55, (1999), 56-58 (p. 58).
[32] Gaiman, 'Reflections on Myth', p. 80.

conscious process, which allows the reader to reflect on the structure and formats of the genre now:

> [M]yths of the 20th Century came from urban legends, [they're] the stories that we tell each other which aren't true but should be, and sometimes then become true. All stories begin as religion, and they begin as things that you really believe, and then after a little while they compost down into myth and then become these stories that help you make sense of the world. […] they become fairy tales and they become stories.[33]

These stories made up of fairy tales and myth are essentially modern fantasy; Gaiman exhibits his awareness of this structural evolutionary process through the fantasies that he constructs, and it is evident that he expects his readers to recognise them too in addition to recognising their role in their evolution.

Applying Reader Response

As seen in Chapter One, reader response is a significant element in metafiction. In order for metafiction to succeed, the reader needs to recognize the subversions to fiction being conducted, be it its references to narrative elements, to previous texts or to itself and the reader, or its displays of levels of fiction/reality. In fantasy, the reader's role is not marginal by any stretch, but is much more subconscious than in metafantasy, as the reader need only possess knowledge of some of fantasy's taproots and be familiar with the concept of the fantastic – the oppositional possible-impossible. While the acceptance of the simultaneous impossibility and possibility of the narrative is vital (which in turn produces an awareness of the nature of those

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[33] Gaiman, Stechfield interview, p. 58.

impossibilities, i.e. an awareness that they are referencing myth, legend, lore, etc.), the awareness of the pre-texts need not be fully conscious all the time.

In addition, the reader is not necessarily required to possess specific detailed knowledge of fantasy's pretexts; they might know that there is such a thing as Greek mythology that features gods, demigods and various heroes doing impossible or astounding feats, but they might not necessarily be knowledgeable of specific names, events, or places. The same is applicable to most, if not all, of fantasy's taproots, especially Western folklore. This means that the reader of modern fantasy, particularly early modern fantasy, is expected to be able to interact successfully with the text because they possess the necessary knowledge to recognize the challenges, subversions and/or references to the fantastic.

The emergence of metafantasy complicates the matter. If metafantasy is metafictional fantasy, that is to say a metafiction of a metafiction, then its referential material would expectedly be more specific and precise than fantasy's. Metafantasy uses fantasy as its taproot, therefore not only does the reader need to have at least a passing familiarity with the fantastic (which they are likely to have), but they also need to have it with modern fantasy (which non-fantasy readers will likely not have). As a form that is largely self-referential, the reader is required by the narrative to be familiar with some of those references in order to interact with the story accordingly. This will become more apparent in the following final section of this chapter and throughout Chapter Three. Nonetheless, metafantasy's referential dynamic can be broken up into different expected modes of operation that enable the reader's required participation to be discussed according to those modes.

As fantasy narratives become more numerous, their use and reuse of similar elements and tropes becomes more and more noticeable. These elements – characters (the hero, the sidekick, the evil dark lord, the wizards, the damsels, the monsters, the gifted chosen children), races (elves – high, dark, wild, forest-, dwarves, fairies – from pixies to gnomes – dragons, spirits, ghosts), settings (pastoral, deserts, forests, caves, and Victorian/Gothic/Edwardian and other urban settings) – become extremely familiar to the frequent fantasy reader as well as to fantasy writers, and a tendency to expect them, and to be aware of how they will be developed and used, becomes normal. It should be noted how not all of these are explicitly fantastic, yet it is through their associations and frequent usage in the genre that they become recognizable as 'fantasy' elements. Familiar plots, such as the human encountering fairyland, the band of eclectic races joining to save the world in epic high fantasy, the wandering barbarian, or the child/children either entrusted with a world-changing quest or simply visiting a fantastic world, may not necessarily be overused, but are certainly well-known to the fantasy reader.

The late twentieth-century fantasy novel, from the 1970s onward, begins to exhibit such an awareness of these common tropes as to serve as knowing nods to the reader. Their portrayal serves to produce the same sense of 'tradition' and 'nostalgia' that fantasy's pre-texts produce in modern fantasy narratives of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth. These elements do not need to be explained to the frequent fantasy reader; instead, they give them a sense of order and

familiarity.[34] McCaffrey does not need to explain her usage of dragons in *Dragonflight* (1968) and can therefore play with the reader's expectations by modifying the trope; the reader of Moorcock's *Elric of Melniboné* (1972) is expected to be familiar with the concepts of elfish-like races, magical swords, and royal family feuds, even when they are changed and restructured; and, in Phyllis Eisenstein's *Sorcerer's Son* (1979) the reader understands the concepts of magic and the idea of wizards battling one another.[35] The recognition of these tropes and modern fantasy elements and the awareness of their usage, allows the reader to identify and enjoy their transformation. A great portion of these tropes and concepts are internalised through childhood exposure to fairytales, fables, and legends, and readers unfamiliar with these need to employ alternate transtexts (in particular hypertexts) in order to find a suitable solution to the narrative's fantastic estrangement.[36]

That said, one of the qualities that distinguishes metafantasy from fantasy is its distancing from- or subversion of fantasy. A metafantasy narrative may not necessarily make use of fantasy's elements to produce a sense of nostalgia or familiarity in the reader, but instead use them to subvert the reader's expectations of their function. This can be seen through the narratives that appear to resemble fantasy, even though they have little in common with them, through the narratives

[34] Neil Gaiman echoed this sentiment in a recent talk given at the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco on March 12, 2015 when discussing narrative and Terry Pratchett's novels, explaining that there are certain things (habits) which frequent readers expect that are not greeted as tedious repetition or lack of originality, but as 'the familiar strains of [glorious beginnings]. ('Neil Gaiman on Terry Pratchett and writing, in conversation with Michael Chabon', *Arts & Ideas at the JCCSF*, 12 March 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeyjn3EaHAM> [Accessed 15 April 2015].

[35] Anne McCaffrey, *Dragonflight* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968); Michael Moorcock, *Elric of Melnibóne* (New York: Ace Books, 1987); Phillys Eisenstein, *Sorcerer's Son* (New York: Del Rey Books, 1979).

[36] See the discussion on Brian Attebery's proposed 'recovery' – a balance between estrangement and familiarity – addressed in Chapter One, section three.

that actively resemble other fantasies and whose purpose *is* to resemble them (as with pastiches), and through the narratives that actively go against the common elements, either by attempting to remove them entirely from the narrative with purposely different elements, or by deconstructing those well-known tropes and reconstructing them. The common thread throughout all of these methods is the fact that the reader must be familiar with modern fantasy and that they must become aware of the fact that it is being changed.

Unlike fantasy, where the reader's awareness of the taproot can often be largely unconscious, in metafantasy the reader's familiarity with the genre of fantasy would have to be higher and more conscious. Gaiman's use of intertextuality in his works will be explored in order to determine how specific or specialised the reader's knowledge of fantasy has to be to understand and relate to the narrative. While it is impossible to determine with perfect accuracy how all readers have to and will respond, certain assumptions can be made when the author's intention is taken into consideration. Because such an analysis can suffer from subjectivity, it will almost exclusively be limited to interviews with the author, as they reveal his intent and thought/creative process, and a number of secondary sources responding to his work that range from scholarly critics to independent fan experts, focusing on only those references that can be determined to be intentional and that would require special knowledge (as opposed to a passing familiarity) of modern fantasy to make them meaningful.

For example, in *American Gods* the main character Shadow encounters a talking raven who gives him directions to his next destination. Ravens are often reminiscent

of Edgar Allan Poe's famous poem, but if Gaiman merely presented a raven without any other clear indication of intentionality, no objective or accurate analysis would be acceptable or productive as it might also be a reference to Hugin and Munin (Norse god Odin's raven companions). It could equally be a reference to the mythical and superstitious depiction of ravens across several different cultures, including Nordic, Celtic, and Native-American, or not even a reference at all. As it is, Gaiman does reference directly; upon seeing the bird, Shadow comments "'Hey", […] "Hugin or Munin, or whoever you are." […] "Say 'Nevermore,' "', eliciting a rude 'Fuck you' from the annoyed bird.[37] The reference to Norse myth as well as Poe is then not an assumption about the author's intent.

This distinction in analysis helps to establish the areas of study with regards to Gaiman's fiction, as only those subjects, areas and structures which are clearly indicative of referencing modern fantasy and its taproots will be used to identify the various aspects and dynamics of metafantasy. At the same time, popular genre tropes, especially references to those frequently identified by Gaiman, Jones, or Pratchett, among others, will also be employed. The remainder of this chapter will briefly address two forms of metafantasy that operate in opposition to the fantasy metatext, though they will be analysed in full in Chapter Four, as well as address the use of postmodern theories in this thesis. Finally, the last section of this chapter will focus on the first practical study of Gaiman's fiction and the metafantasy he employs when writing the most blatant and direct form of metafiction: parodies.

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[37] Gaiman, *American Gods* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 158-159.

Additional Elements to Consider

I - Resembling Fantasy While Lacking Fantastic Elements

Peake's *Gormenghast* series (1946-1959) is well-known for its lack of explicit fantasy elements while nonetheless feeling like a fantasy gothic novel. In 'Encounter with Fantasy', Gary K. Wolfe comments that Peake's novels 'contain little or nothing that contravenes what we know to be possible' except for its 'bizarre and unfamiliar [setting] and unusual characters'. He then quotes C. N. Manlove, who said about Gormenghast that 'nothing "supernatural" or magical by our standards is in fact present'.[38] Even though critics like Ben Robertson make a case for why the novels are still fantasy, he agrees that 'there is no evidence in the text [to suggest that its events] are "really" magical' and that any fantasy and magic in the narrative is produced by the characters' acceptance of the rituals they must perform daily. In other words, as argued here, Gormenghast's fantasy is sustained by the text's priming and the reader's genre-based expectation.[39] The uncanny and unfamiliar setting and the gothic language and style employed are enough to make the reader, particularly those familiar with fantasy and gothic fantasy, associate it with the genre. Not only this, the very absence of fantastic elements in the familiar fantasy setting reinforces the reader's mindset of fantasy. In other words, the bizarre landscape and strange characters make the reader think of fantasy and the lack of other fantastic elements becomes noticeable, making the reader more aware of modern fantasy as a whole.

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[38] Gary K. Wolfe, 'The Encounter with Fantasy', in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Sandner (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), pp. 222-235 (p. 225).
[39] Ben Robertson, 'Some thoughts on magic in Peake's Gormenghast', *Evening Redness*, 2013 < http://eveningredness.net/2013/08/31/some-thoughts-on-magic-in-peakes-gormenghast/> [accessed 17 July 2015]

A novel like Ellen Kushner's *Swordspoint* (1987) similarly lacks many of the common recognizable elements of modern fantasy yet is unmistakably classified as one.[40] Clute's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* describes it as:

> [A] DYNASTIC FANTASY set in a RURITANIAN 18th century CITY [whose] total lack of supernatural paraphernalia might seem to blur its generic identity, but in a sense the structure of the depicted society, which has no exact historical analogue, is itself the fantastic element.[41]

The novel's setting resembles that of other common modern fantasies, particularly those that feature knights, bards, and skilled thieves, and the language and style also reflect these familiar tropes. When it comes to impossibility and the marvellous in supernatural terms, however, the novel is entirely devoid of fantasy's most defining characteristic. Nonetheless, like *Gormenghast*, it is still classed as fantasy, indicating that 'resemblance' to fantasy is enough to produce in the reader the sense of the fantastic without the need for truly impossible elements. It is equally indicative of the fact that this type of fantasy that produces the feeling of the fantastic is inextricably linked to the modern genre and to the awareness of that modern genre. Without that link, the reader's sense of the fantastic might not be produced.

Other twentieth and twenty-first-century examples include George R.R. Matrin's *A Game of Thrones* (1996) and even Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* (2004), both of which contain fantastic traces that are overshadowed by the

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[40] Kushner's novel is often classed under the fantasy subgenres of 'fantasy of manners', 'mannerpunk', and 'dynasty fantasy'. (Ellen Kushner, *Swordspoint* (New York: Arbor House, 1987)).
[41] Donald G. Keller, 'Kushner, Ellen', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), p. 551. See also David Mathew's 'Dividing the Rewards: An Interview with Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman', *SF Site* [accessed 19 August 2015] <https://www.sfsite.com/11b/dm69.htm>

non-fantastic events (in particular politics and social issues) taking place.[42] Martin's novel, in particular, demonstrates how the reader's awareness of other modern fantasies influences their perception of the novel. While in subsequent novels from the series of *A Song of Ice and Fire* Martin is more liberal in his use of fantastic elements, the first novel is notable for its resemblance to fantasy despite his purposeful restraint of regarding the fantastic. In spite of this, most of the novel's reviewers, and in particular its publishers, have liberally equated the novel to Tolkien's works, and have described it as unmistakable 'fantasy'.

For instance, while Lisa Padol concedes in her 1997 review, that Martin 'makes no claim to be High Fantasy', she also comments that 'there is practically no chance of mistaking *A Game of Thrones* for anything other than what it is: a carefully packaged, right down to the selection of quotes on the back cover, first volume in a fantasy series'.[43] Similarly, Neal Barker says in his review for the *Science Fiction Research Association Review* that:

> *A Game of Thrones* is clad in the raiment of modern fantasy publishing. It comes replete with endpaper maps and an appendix, and heraldic crests adorn the beginning of each chapter. Like many recent fantasy novels, it amounts to a veritable tome in terms of size.[44]

And in his review for *Vector*, Steve Jeffrey begins by stating that:

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[42] It should be noted, however, that out of the four examples, Clarke's novel is the most 'fantastic'. Nonetheless, it does contain long periods of socio-politics and class issues, making the magical elements secondary to the plot. (George R.R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones* (London: Harper Voyager, 1996); Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004)).

[43] Lisa Padol, '*A Game of Thrones* by George R. R. Martin [Review]', *The New York Review of Science Fiction* (1997), p. 23.

[44] Neal Baker, 'Martin, George R. R. *A Game of Thrones* [Review]', *Science Fiction Research Association Review* (1997), 56-57 (p. 56).

> *A Game of Thrones* appears with all the distinguishing features of the fantasy blockbuster, as Book One of *A Song of Fire and Ice*. Those distinguishing features include a map, cunningly divided into The North and The South, an Appendix listing a cast of Cecil B. DeMille proportions, and the obligatory jacket blurb announcing 'the most imaginative, ambitious and compelling fantasy epic since *Lord of the Rings*' and Martin as yet another 'true heir' to Tolkien.[45]

Interestingly, although the novel looks like the typical high fantasy narrative it is actually consciously different from *The Lord of the Rings* and other Tolkienesque fantasies in terms of plot, character development, and especially in terms of the fantastic itself. In fact, Martin has been quoted saying that his goal was to avoid any 'overt fantasy elements, [and do] something that would only be a fantasy in that it took place in imaginary places and avoided known historical facts'.[46] The world he creates – the world of the Seven Kingdoms – is remarkably un-fantastic, especially when placed against other fantasies, with the only indication from the narrative that it is another world stemming from the fact that seasons operate differently. There are no green suns, no talking trees, no enchanted forests (although there are superstitions surrounding some forests), no mystic mountains, and no evil-drenched barren wastelands. It is not surprising that Martin has stated in interviews that he originally debated writing 'just a historical novel in a world with a different sort of history'.[47]

Metafantasy then can establish connections between the narrative with little-to-no fantasy elements and the genre of modern fantasy, by subtly utilising familiar

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[45] Steve Jeffery, 'George R.R. Martin *A Game of Thrones* [Review]', in *Vector*, 1997, pp. 19-20.
[46] *Amazon.co.uk*, 'A Storm Coming: An interview with George R R Martin', April 2012 <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/feature/-/49161/026-1281322-7450821> [accessed 10 April 2012]
[47] *GamePro*, 'An Interview with George R. R. Martin', *GamePro Magazine* (2003), <http://web.archive.org/web/20031004030402/http://www.gamepro.com/entertainment/books_comics/books/features/30601.shtml> [Accessed 10 April 2012].

settings, styles, language, characters and even plots that place the reader (the fantasy reader in particular) on a state of heightened awareness of fantasy. This in turn ascribes more fantasy to the narrative than it might at first contain. The 'meta-meta' dynamic develops because fantasy in itself already has 'meta' qualities. As fantasy takes its taproots, deconstructs and reconstructs them into new forms and invites the reader to be aware of these changes, so metafantasy, by alluding to fantasy via subtly bizarre settings and familiar elements, deconstructs and reconstructs fantasy.

By employing this apparent awareness of 'fantasy' as a referential source, metafantasy shows a 'direct and immediate concern with fiction-making itself', revealing a focus on the elements that make up fantasy.[48] In 'The Art of Metafiction', Larry McCaffery identifies metafiction through its usage of 'acts of subverting or ignoring specific conventions and […] introducing [of] others instead'.[49] This is also applicable to metafantasy as through its various referential techniques it subverts the original or familiar conventions of fantasy.

II - Active Deviation and Distancing from Fantasy Tropes

As seen, metafantasy can be recognized by identifying those narratives which feel like or resemble fantasy despite having few fantastic elements, and those narratives that actively imitate modern fantasy by paying homage to its recognizable form or mocking and ridiculing it. It can also be perceived through those narratives that actively attempt to distance themselves from traditional fantasy elements. Unlike narratives that contain few fantastic elements but nonetheless retain a feeling and

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[48] Larry McCaffery 'The Art of Metafiction', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1995), pp. 181-193 (p. 182).
[49] McCaffery, p. 182.

awareness of fantasy, these narratives purposefully seek to utilise elements that are entirely or at least partially unrecognisable to other modern fantasy narratives. These narratives call attention to their own construction (the fact that they do not resemble traditional or well-known modern fantasies) while drawing attention to those very fantasies they are trying to be distanced from.

An example of this form is China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*, a metafantasy that through its overt attempt at being different from Tolkienesque fantasy, results in affirming those fantasies. The novel, set in an urban landscape, is full of uncanny, marvellous and impossible beings so that the narrative is easily classifiable as fantastic. The reader familiar with fantasy, however, will likely realise that the narrative does not contain many of the most recognizable fantasy tropes. From the urban setting and unfamiliar creatures to the lack of brave heroes, magic, archetypal evil characters, or recognizable creatures and common landscapes, the reader is reminded of how different the narrative is to other fantasies. This recognition places them in a state of awareness of external fantasies as well as of the novel. These two forms of metafantasy will be analysed in depth in Chapter Four because they help explain metafantasy's connection to the genre of fantasy.

III - Postmodernism and Metafantasy

Any study of metafiction and genre evolution necessitates acknowledgement of postmodernism because historically they have often been linked or associated with one another, prompting confusion over the question of whether they are all describing similar forms. It is unsurprising that such a link might be suggested given

that both metafiction and postmodernism began to be formally studied around the same decades.[50] In addition, both terms are often described in similar ways, stressing the concepts of self-awareness and deconstruction. For example, Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon assert that 'the critical edge of postmodernity's deconstructing of the modern universalizing tendency comes from its awareness of the value and significance of respecting difference and otherness'.[51]

Natoli and Hutcheon's *A Postmodern Reader* further states that the general condition of postmodernity is 'an acknowledgment of the impossibility (and, indeed, the undesirability) of reaching any absolute and final "Truth"'.[52] This concern with impossibility and truth echoes statements about metafiction and fantasy, showing a link between metafiction, fantasy, and postmodernity. In 'Modernism versus Postmodernism: Toward an Analytic Distinction', David J. Herman explores Hutcheon's 'historiographic metafiction' – a fiction that 'operates through a subversive, highly self-reflexive use of parody'.[53] He comments that: '[for] Hutcheon, the defining gesture of postmodernism is precisely the parodic dissolution and reconstitution of tradition'.[54] Subversive narratives and self-reflexive parody are as much a mark of postmodernism as they are clear indications of metafiction.

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[50] 'It was not until the late 1960s that "postmodernism" gained currency as a literary-critical term' (Paul Maltby, 'Excerpts from *Dissident Postmodernists*', in *A Postmodern Reader*, ed. by Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 519-537 (p. 519)). 'The term "metafiction" itself seems to have originated in an essay by the American critic and self-conscious novelist William H. Gass (in Gass 1970). However, terms like [this] are a reminder of what has been, since the 1960s, a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world.' [Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 2.]

[51] Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds., 'Introduction', in *A Postmodern Reader* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. vii-xiv (p. x).

[52] Natoli and Hutcheon, pp. x-xi.

[53] Maltby, p. 526.

[54] David J. Herman, 'Modernism versus Postmodernism': Toward an Analytic Distinction', in *A Postmodern Reader*, ed. by Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, pp. 157-192 (pp. 170-171).

Some critics have gone further than mere suggestion, outright stating that 'postmodernism includes […] the self-reflexive or metafictional novel' precisely because it reflects 'the awareness that all language is self-referential,' as well as arguing that postmodernism's 'indeterminacy': […] liberates the imagination from old, outworn categories, and makes a revaluation of such sub-literary genres as fantasy and science-fiction possible. [55] Hans Bertens's essay, largely citing Raymond Federman, further elucidates that:

> "There is … behind the new fiction [Postmodernism]'s project an effort of sincerity. A search for a new truth. A genuine effort to reinstate things, the world, and man in their proper places – in a purer state" (Federman 1978, 128) [which] leads postmodern literature in two directions. The first is the direction of meta-fiction. Novels must expose themselves continually as fictions, they must be "an endless denunciation of {their} own fraudulence" (Federman 1978, 122). Knowledge about the world – traditionally claimed by fiction – must be replaced by "the act of searching – researching even – within the fiction itself for the meaning of what it means to write fiction. It is an act of self-reflection…" (Federman 1978, 122).[56]

Even Waugh agrees that '[metafiction] is a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement often referred to as post-modernism.'[57] Other critics, like Paul Maltby, however, have taken contrary stances. For him, '"metafiction" has a much wider compass than "postmodernism"', arguing that it is:

> [G]enerally used to denote *any systematically self-reflective* work of fiction, that is to say, fiction which investigates and exposes the processes of its own

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[55] Hans Bertens, 'The Postmodern *Weltanschauung* and its Relation to Modernism: an Introductory Survey', in *A Postmodern Reader*, ed. by Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, pp. 25-70 (p. 47, 48) referring to Ihab and Sally Hassan's *Innovation/Renovation: New Perspectives on the Humanities*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).
[56] Bertens, p. 57. Bracket insertions are my own, while brace insertions are in the original text.
[57] Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 21.

construction and, by implication, the codes and shifting parameters of
"literature".[58]

He distinguishes this form from postmodernism explaining that the latter is
conceived as 'relating the fiction in question to a postmodern culture or
postmodernity' while metafiction 'lacks sociohistorical reference'.[59] This raises
questions regarding the relationship of fantasy – as a genre that shares its form with
metafiction – and metafantasy – as a metafiction associated with fantasy – to
postmodernism. While both forms, because of their metafictive properties, engage
systematically with prior works of fiction and with their own generic – meaning
genre – form, thereby exposing the processes of their own construction, they are also
concerned with the sociohistorical changes that accompany them. Fantasy does not
merely make use of its pre-texts in order to transform them into new narratives, it
also reflects the shift in belief in the supernatural and the mindset of its readership.
Similarly, metafantasy reflects society's increased awareness of literary fantasy,
regarding fantasy as a form to be 'played with' and transformed. Thus, both fantasy
and metafantasy call attention to their own fictionality and the concepts of story, but
they are also reflective of the specific society that produced them at a specific
period.

It is then understandable that critics like George Aichele, in his article on 'Two
Forms of Metafantasy' would place fantasy in a postmodern context, since in
fantasy '[from a] postmodern view, there is no escape from the abyss that opens
between the signifier, which is always meaningless-in-belief (because incomplete,

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[58] Maltby, p. 525.
[59] Maltby, p. 525.

empty), and the signified which would fulfil its meaning'.[60] The argument that fantasy (or metafantasy) is postmodern, following the notion that if fantasy is metafiction and metafiction is (at least partly) postmodern then fantasy is postmodern, has its merits. In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale comments:

> The implications should be clear: postmodernist fiction has close affinities with the genre of the fantastic, much as it has affinities with the science-fiction genre, and it draws upon the fantastic for motifs and topoi much as it draws upon science fiction. It is able to draw upon the fantastic in this way because the fantastic genre, like science fiction and like postmodernist fiction itself, is governed by the ontological dominant.[61]

That said, this subject requires closer analysis that would cause deviation from this thesis' targets: determining that fantasy is metafictional and that metafantasy is a doubly metafictional response to fantasy. In addition, declaring fantasy to be wholly postmodern is problematic because the latter is much more tied to specific temporal spaces than either fantasy or metafantasy. For example, it raises questions such as whether nineteenth century fantasy – a clearly metafictive form – is also therefore postmodern at a time before literary postmodernism even began. While suggestions might be made, further study and detailed conclusions to these questions cannot be drawn at this time.

Section 3: Gaiman and Parody

This thesis' practical study has been divided into seven categories that reveal seven possible aspects of metafantasy: parody, pastiche, retellings, genre-aware characters,

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[60] Aichele, 'Two Forms of Metafantasy', pp. 55-56.
[61] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 74.

fantasy told as non-fantasy, non-fantasy told as fantasy, and dubious fantasy. As stated in the Introduction, the last three categories are placed in the chapter that establishes the genre-relationship between fantasy and metafantasy (Chapter Four) because they subvert fantasy by challenging and denying its fundamental features. The first four forms, on the other hand, subvert fantasy by performing celebratory reflections and allusions that foreground the existence of the genre as a metatext. Unlike the narratives that will be analysed in Chapter Four, the texts in chapters Two and Three are decidedly fantasy as well as metafantasy, whereas those in Chapter Four are often not (thereby best representing the distinction between the two). Because parody is the most blatant form of metafiction, as the critics cited ahead will show, this section of the study has been chosen to be included in this theory chapter. This leaves the next three forms of metafantasy to be scrutinized in Chapter Three.

Defining Parody

Critical theory on parody is wide-ranging, dating as far back to Aristotle and currently studied by dozens of modern and postmodern scholars from Gérard Genette to Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon. As Margaret A. Rose explains in her introduction to *Parody/Meta-Fiction*, part of the problem that arises in defining it derives from selecting and applying the appropriate approach, be it based on etymology, usage as comedy, attitude of the parodist, effect on the reader and structure of texts.[62] For the purposes of this work, however, attempts at directly defining parody are foregone in favour of acknowledging its structural dynamics,

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[62] Margaret A. Rose, *Parody/Meta-Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 17.

namely its author-text-reader relationship. Parody, by existing in a kind of spatial textual nearness to the subject being imitated, requires awareness on the part of the reader to recognize both the dynamics of parody being enacted and the source(s) being referenced.

Nevertheless, it consists of more than sheer imitation. In her analysis of parody's metafictiveness, Rose references Alfred Liede who, in arguing that parody is only 'a special form of conscious imitation' arrives at the faulty conclusion that 'complete artistry in the writing of parody exists when "it is not able to be distinguished from the original"'.[63] As Rose counters however:

> A history of parody [shows] that parody has served to bring the concept of imitation itself into question, and that while imitation may be used as a technique in the parody it is the use of incongruity which distinguishes the parody from other forms of quotation and literary imitation, and shows its function to be more than imitation alone.[64]

Borges' story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote'* serves as an apt example of this balance in parody. The story is a parody of a critical review and analysis of fictional author Pierre Menard. Menard, having attempted to immerse himself so completely into the life, culture and political environment of early seventeenth century Spain, is able to create a word for word imitation (re-creation or reproduction) of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.[65] This flawless imitation would, under Liede's definition, be considered a parody, yet by lacking a 'critical refunctioning' of the 'literary material' performed to 'comic effect', as Rose and other modern

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[63] Rose, p. 22.
[64] Rose, p. 22.
[65] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote'*, in *Fictions*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 33-43.

scholars have identified it, Menard's imitation is just that – it performs none of the other functions intrinsic to parody.[66] Borges' story, on the other hand, is parodic, as he employs both an imitation the style and rhetoric of modern critics combined with a critical transformation that creates a wholly new narrative.

Parody and Metafiction

Since Rose's study, there has been little doubt among metafiction theorists that narratives that employ parody or that are largely parodic in nature and intent, engage actively in metafiction. In 'Parody and poesis in feminist fairy tales', Anna Alemann directly states that 'parody is metafiction, a criticism of established forms' while in 'The Novel Now', David Lodge equates parody with such metafictional ploys as framing narratives, other kinds of intertextuality, and self-reflexivity, calling them, following the Russian formalists, ways of 'baring the device'.[67] In *Metafiction*, Waugh explains why parody is metafictive: 'parody fuses creation with critique', which echoes her earlier description of metafiction as the 'theory of fiction through the practice of fiction'.[68] She also references Susan Stewart who states that in irony, parodies, satires, and burlesques 'speech begins to envelop context' so that 'what before was considered to be a matter of course now becomes a matter of discourse, subject to ongoing, ragged-edged interpretations'.[69] Parody is therefore, next to an outright signalling to its own construction performed by a self-aware narrator or a self-aware character's behaviour (see Chapter Three for a discussion of this form of

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[66] Rose, p. 22, 23.
[67] Anna Altmann, 'Parody and poesis in feminist fairy tales', *Canadian Children's Literature* (1994), 73, pp. 22-31 (p.22); David Lodge, 'The Novel Now', in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie, pp. 145-160 (p. 135).
[68] Waugh, p. 68, p. 2.
[69] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense* (Baltimore, ML: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 20.

metafiction in fantasy), the most obvious – i.e. self-revealing – form of metafiction,

and the one in which, as Waugh posits, 'new developments in fiction [tend] to

evolve'.[70]

In short then, depending on the approach, different critics define parody on its own

without correlation to metafiction as literature which either 'offers some form of

comic relief, thus acting as a playful form of enlightening entertainment' or as an

'imitation of another, with a distance' that offers 'commentary or critique, though

now necessarily comedy'.[71] This curious contradiction actually serves the discussion

of parody in metafantasy appropriately as, on one hand, the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*

defines parody in relation to the genre as an 'imitation of the work of an individual

writer or group of writers, generally to mock comically' and on the other, as a self-

conscious subversive response to the restraints of the mimetic novel.[72]

It should also be noted how, concerning the intertextual dynamics and values of this

device, Mary Orr deconstructs Genette's views on parody, separating it from satire

and travesty and what he calls other 'hybrid genres' that serve as 'counter-genres' –

as responses –, emphasizing once again that parody operates as a 'transformation of

texts'.[73] Addressing *Palimpsests*, Orr explains that 'individual works can be

parodied through particularization, but genres, because [of] generalizations, can only

be imitated. […] parody is always intertextual, intertextuality is not always

[70] Waugh, p. 69.
[71] Beate Müller, *Parody: Dimensions and Perspectives* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), p. 6; Dorthe Andersen, 'L-Space: Transtextuality and its Functions in Terry Pratchett's Discworld', in *Marvellous Fantasy*, ed. by Jørgen Riber Christensen (Aalborg: Aalborg University Press, 2009), p. 63.
[72] Clute, 'Parody', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 746.
[73] Mary Orr, *Intertextuality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), p. 108. The notion of countergenres and transformation as a form of genre-evolution is addressed in chapter 3.

parody'.[74] The purpose of both Genette and Orr's distinctions is to assert that parody

is not a genre of itself, but a device that acts upon individual texts or genres. In the

case of fantasy, and especially metafantasy, parody's transforming capacity reveals

the fact that, as Orr says, '[it] is always intertextual', but that the genre itself –

fantasy and later metafantasy – is not necessarily always parodic. This must be

acknowledged, particularly of metafantasy, given that, because parody is such an

obvious form of self-aware fiction, it can be too simple to consider all forms of

metafantasies as parodies of the genre of fantasy. Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series,

by virtue of being both metafantasy and parodic, should not be taken to be the ruling

example of metafantasy. In addition, it can be argued that, in the same way that a

distinction is made between the intertextual dynamics of fantasy and metafantasy, in

terms of the former's taproot texts and the latter's taproot genre, so a distinction can

be made between the parody of fantasy's taproots: fantasy parody, and the parody of

metafantasy's taproots: parody of fantasy.

In the first, the genre is the one enacting the parody and is therefore the subject,

while in the second, parody is being enacted upon the genre, making fantasy the

object being parodied. An example of the former, so as to demonstrate the

distinction, is James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen: A Comedy of Justice* – a parodic take

on courtly love narratives, medieval Arthurian legend, and heroic epics. Cabell

utilises fantasy to imitate, mock, and satirize these forms, whereas a writer like

Pratchett writes genre-oriented parody. A parody of fantasy, in other words,

necessitates and presupposes an awareness and acknowledgement of the genre as a

genre – however fuzzy the parameters of that genre might be.

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[74] Orr, p. 109.

Parody of Fantasy and Metafantasy

When addressing the subject of 'travesties' in *Nonsense*, Stewart explains that a 'way to transform a text by rearrangement within its boundaries is to "pervert" it, to twist its elements into a different conclusion from the one it conventionally effects'.[75] She gives an example of 'proverbs' as a form that is often 'victim' to subversion, drawing attention to their reliance on both parties, subverter and receptor, to possess knowledge of the original and of the possibility for subversion. Phrases like 'A stitch in time gathers no moss' or 'an apple a day keeps the fingers sticky', Stewart elaborates, 'depend upon a knowledge of the text being manipulated and an inversion of the metaphorical power of the proverb to the literal power of nonsense'.[76] She also equates these perversions with parody, saying that 'parody is a matter of substituting elements within a dimension of a given text in such a way that the resulting text stands in an inverse or incongruous relation to the borrowed text'.[77] Finally, Stewart further argues that 'parody can only survive so long as there is common sense, so long as there is discourse that takes itself seriously'.[78] Parodies of fantasy, then, can be regarded as a revitalizing device for the genre, because they transform into even more self-reflexive metafictions than it already is. In order to do so, nonetheless, they must not succumb, as some disparaging critics seem to imply of parody, to mere exaggerated or mocking imitation.[79]

In *Fabulation and Metafiction*, Scholes speaks derisively of parody saying that it 'feeds off the organism it attacks [i.e. the thing parodied] and precipitates their

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[75] Stewart, p. 185.
[76] Stewart, p.185.
[77] Stewart, p. 185.
[78] Stewart, p. 186.
[79] See discussion above regarding mere imitation's lack of metafictive commentary.

mutual destruction' and Altmann, who accurately identifies parody's critical insight, still comments that it does not 'make new use of the forms, [or] create new meaning'.[80] In *Modern Genre Theory*, Duff also makes a similar caveat when discussing the transformative power of parody saying that while 'parody explicitly works by exposing and subverting conventions', the parodist's 'ransacking' can also cause the possibilities of a genre to be exhausted.[81]

Conversely, critic David Langford, who has written extensively on parody in the fantastic genres, as well as written several parodies himself, explores Terry Pratchett's brand of parody in his introduction to *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature* and offers a more optimistic view of parody of genre precisely because he acknowledges that an effective parody of fantasy necessitates more than mocking imitative ransacking. He argues that though 'superficial commentators' often describe Pratchett's Discworld series as fantasy parody, the books, in fact, employ a wide range of real-world issues pastiches, as well as parodies.[82] Fantasy parody and parody of fantasy, like all parody and other forms of metafiction, rely on recognition of the constituent elements being re-appropriated and transformed. Parodies of fantasy can, in many cases, be thought to be highly exclusive forms, that are, as Langford puts it:

> […] written for fantasy fans who will recognize the nods [in Pratchett's case] to Fritz Leiber's heroic duo Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser (here Bravd and the Weasel) and their beloved, sleazy city of Lankhmar (Ankh-Morpork), to H.P.

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[80] Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 109; Altmann, p. 22.

[81] David Duff, ed., 'Introduction', in *Modern Genre Theory* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 7-8.

[82] 'Fantasy parody' is used here as Langford uses it, though it is more accurately described as a 'parody of fantasy' because he is referring to parodies that deconstruct fantasy-as-genre as much as employ fantasy-as-mode.

Lovecraft's unspeakable tentacular abominations (Bel-Shamharoth, reduced in *Pyramids* to a mere patron deity of youth hostels operated by the Young Men's Reformed Cultists of the Ichor God Bel-Shamharoth Association), and to Anne McCaffrey's not entirely plausible dragons – here rethought as magical psychic projections which may be semi-transparent […].[83]

Despite these intertextually linked elements being, as Duff called it, 'ransacked', what makes Pratchett's Discworld compelling, Langford argues, is that his mimetically-constructed world reflects ideas from both within and without Fantasyland (the word being used here to mean the fantasy metatext), and it is this recombination of various elements (recognizable tropes, stereotypes and other traditional patterns) with non-fantasy (and as Langford argues of Pratchett, non-fantastic) ideas that creates a more unique and compelling form of parody.[84] By being inclusive in his hypertextual signalling, Pratchett is able to, on one hand, avoid the exclusivity that results from a parody of fantasy's often highly specialized metafictions, and on the other, revitalise the genre by widening its scope through the addition of non-fantasy-element referencing.

Gaiman's parody, though nowhere as extreme as Pratchett's, also aims to transform its intertextual reflective elements instead of merely offering exaggerated imitation in order to produce comedy. Additionally, the difference between parody serving the narrative and the narrative serving parody, actually becomes an appropriate distinction that will resurface throughout other examples of metafantasy possibilities mentioned in this chapter. Unlike with Henry N. Beard and Douglas C. Kenny's *Bored of the Rings*, certainly a metafantasy (as it takes a modern fantasy text as its

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[83] David Langford, 'Introduction', in *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature*, ed. by Andrew M. Butler, Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Baltimore, MD: Old Earth Books, 2004), pp. 3-13 (p. 8).
[84] 'Mimetically-constructed' should be understood to mean, in this case, 'imitative' and not 'realistic'.

main intertext) but one that fails at the metafictive capability for critical analysis, Gaiman's parodies, like Pratchett's, perform a purposeful transformation.[85]

An example of this knowing parodic transformation is seen in the opening scene to Gaiman and Pratchett's *Good Omens*. The novel's first section is titled 'In the beginning' followed by the opening lines 'It was a nice day', establishing a direct intertextual connection to Genesis, only to parodically subvert it.[86] Instead of 'God created the heavens and the earth', the unpoetic statement in the novel stands in mundane contrast to the original. This is compounded by subsequent comment that 'rain hadn't been invented yet [but the] clouds massing east of Eden suggested that the first thunderstorm was on its way, and it was going to be a big one', comically understating the implications of the biblical deluge. The introduction of Aziraphale and Crowley is equally suffused with this parody via tone-contradiction, though its purpose is not merely humour or mocking derision of the original text, but the necessary (and, note, reconstructive) establishment of the characters' personalities. This is most noticeable during their exchange concerning divine ineffability and the fate of a certain flaming sword. In the original Genesis quote, the text states: 'So [God] drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life'.[87] On the other hand, *Good Omens* satirises the scene by adding character-developing dialogue:

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[85] Of *Bored of the Rings*, Langford states that the parody falls flat because 'the authors couldn't find enough raw material in Tolkien himself, and struggled to get laughs by merciless use of anachronisms – dragging in, for example, all those American brand names (assumed to be inherently hilarious).' [David Langford, *He Do the Time Police in Different Voices* (Holicong, PA: Wildside Press, 2003), p. 17.]

[86] Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006 [originally 1990]), pp. 1, 3.

[87] Genesis 3.24, *King James Version* (London: Oxford University Press), p. 3.

Eventually Crawly said: "Didn't you have a flaming sword?"

"Er," said the angel. A guilty expression passed across his face, and then came back and camped there.

"You did, didn't you?" said Crawly. "It flamed like anything."

"Er, well –"

"It looked very impressive, I thought."

"Yes, but, well –"

"Lost it, have you?"

"Oh no! No, not exactly, more –"

"Well?"

Aziraphale looked wretched. "If you must know," he said, a trifle testily, "I gave it away."[88]

This is revisited after Aziraphale obtains Agnes Nutter's book of prophesy and the narration comments on the various rare books the angel owns, including the 'Buggre Alle This' Bible, which includes three additional verses to the original Genesis text, reading:

> 25. And the Lord spake unto the Angel that guarded the eastern gate, *saying* Where is the flaming sword which was given unto thee?
> 26. And the Angel said, I had it here only a moment ago, I must have put *it* down somewhere, forget my own head next.
> 27. And the Lord did not ask him again.[89]

The absurdity of Aziraphale's Promethean-like kindness is both a parody of the Cherubim's task in Genesis 3, as well as an establishment of his willingness to bend rules under the guise of 'it must be part of the Plan, because ineffability'. Moreover, parodying this scene from Genesis does not destroy or ransack it, but instead builds

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[88] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, p. 4.
[89] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, p. 50.

upon the thing parodied, using imitation and change with narrative purpose – i.e., in the service of fantasy and storytelling.

Gaiman's Parodies of Fantasy

In 'An Autopsy of Storytelling: Metafiction and Neil Gaiman', Chris Dowd argues that Gaiman's stories, by virtue of being about stories, are metafictional: 'metafictional stories purposely draw attention to the artifice of storytelling itself'.[90] This is certainly accurate, though as will be seen throughout the following chapter, by interacting with a genre whose purpose is to tell stories, thereby drawing attention to its own artifice (as argued in Chapter One), Gaiman's fiction is more than just metafictive. That Gaiman is a storyteller who tells stories about stories populated by characters who tell stories or that include settings consciously constructed out of Story, there is no doubt.[91] From the Shaper himself Morpheus, to the *Sandman* volume 'World's End' to 'Murder Mysteries' to almost all of his fantasy and fairytale retellings, to the very structures of *Stardust*, *Neverwhere* and *American Gods*, the overarching concern is always Story. By constructing a story about the act of storytelling that is both parodic in execution and in subject, in addition to relating to a fantastic genre while performing fantasy, Gaiman achieves a complexly multifaceted metafantasy.

In his article on Gaiman's irony, Sándor Klapcsik unintentionally echoes Waugh's comments on metafiction regarding 'what has been, since the 1960s, a more general

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[90] Chris Dowd, 'An Autopsy of Storytelling: Metafiction and Neil Gaiman', in *The Neil Gaiman Reader*, ed. by Darrell Schweitzer (Rockville, MD: Wildside Press LLC, 2007), pp. 103-114 (p. 104).
[91] Note Pratchett's 'narrativium' as well as his 'law of narrative causality' from *Witches Abroad* and other Discworld novels, which Gaiman seems to exploit if not in name, then in concept.

cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate

their experience of the world […] drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world

as book, but […] recasting it', when he explains how 'our postmodern culture is

eager to read and analyse contemporary rewritings of fairy tales and fantasy

parodies'.[92] At the same time he raises the question concerning the apparent

contradiction between this interest in fantasy parodies and Tolkien's condition that

'if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the

magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at not

explained away'.[93] Klapcsik argues that:

> Tolkien's principles are in sharp contrast with Mendlesohn's liminal
> fantasies – which "create a moment of doubt, sometimes in the protagonist,
> but also in the reader" (*Rhetorics* 182) – and with Gaiman's oeuvre, as he
> often uses dreams and parody and compares storytelling to magicians'
> illusions with mirrors.[94]

In addition, Klapcsik compares Gaiman's 'balancing and twining of the mundane

and the miraculous' to Todorov's hesitation.[95] However, if Tolkien's warning was

taken to mean the fantastic itself, it can be argued that what must not be 'laughed at'

or 'explained away' is the balancing act – the conscious-doubling awareness –

necessary for maintaining fantasy, that is, if the parody is to remain a fantasy text. A

parody of fantasy that ultimately subverts the very fantastic nature of the genre,

would continue being a 'parody of fantasy', but might cease to be a fantasy

narrative. This dynamic will be further explored in Chapter Four. For the purposes

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[92] Waugh, *Metafiction*, pp. 2-3; Klapcsik, p. 317.
[93] J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', in *The Monster and the Critic*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2006), pp. 109-161 (p. 114).
[94] Klapcsik, p. 318.
[95] Klapcsik, p. 318, citing the Foreword to Gaiman's *Smoke and Mirrors*, p. 8.

of this section, only those narratives which are parodies of fantasy as well as fantasies in and of themselves are examined.

Of Gaiman's novels, the most direct parody work is, as mentioned, *Good Omens*, but as occurs often with his metafantasy works, elements of pastiche, retelling and self-awareness can also be identified. The novel, which will be discussed more in depth in terms of its metafictional awareness in Chapter Three, began as a parody of the *William* series by Richmal Crompton – a series about the adventures of a mischievous young boy named William Brown written between 1921 and 1970.[96] The characterization of Adam Young and the Them – the Antichrist and his band of less-than-delinquent friends, still bears echoes of this original idea. In terms of its parodic intent, the narrative derives its basic plot from the 1976 film *The Omen* – a blatant allusion – in addition to the rampant biblical parodying (much of which is derived from cultural perceptions and traditions): the switching of a human baby with the antichrist is parodied by the inclusion of a third baby and its resulting inevitable mix-up, the name of the satanic nun order is purposefully ridiculous, the personifications of the good angel and bad devil through Crowley and Aziraphale are decidedly uncharacteristic of genre perceptions of good and evil, etc.

There are also, naturally, plenty of parodic instances/passages concerning the end of times, be it the Biblical apocalypse, which serves as the main intertextual source, or other visions of Armageddon from such famous prognosticators as Nostradamus and Mother Shipton. The important factor, however, is not tracing Gaiman and

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[96] Also sometimes referred to as the *Just William* series because of the first book (Andrew Delahunty and Sheila Dignen, 'Just William', *The Oxford Dictionary of Reference and Allusion* (Oxford University Press, 2010), <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.liv.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199567454.001.0001/acref-9780199567454-e-1026> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

Pratchett's parodic intertext, but acknowledging their transformation of it (instead of exaggerated imitation), and their integration of it. Note, for instance, that while Crowley and Aziraphale are parodies of the traditional good angel and the bad demon trope whose relationship is based on sarcasm and cynicism, in large part, this characterization does not exist purely for its own sake. Instead, their personalities influence their motivations, spurring the plot. In fact, while the novel is admittedly interspersed with gags (all CDs that remain in a car long enough turn into *Best of Queen* albums, for example) or comic-relief instances (the sudden appearance of Tibetan monks and aliens in the last act, for instance), the majority of the parody serves the narrative, and not vice versa. A metafantasy might be providing commentary and criticism on the genre, but it must also maintain the necessary narrative cohesion to be an independent fiction, if it is to possess the capacity to revitalize the genre. Otherwise, it would be mere deconstruction with no reconstruction, criticism without the attempt at legitimate fiction, making it a poor metafiction.[97]

Among Gaiman's short stories, surprisingly few can be classed as only parodies. Even the Lovecraftian parodies 'I Cthulhu' and 'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar' are also firmly embedded within the pastiching culture surrounding much of post-Lovecraft Lovecraftian fiction (see Lin Carter, August Derleth or S.T. Joshi, for examples and criticism), though lines like '*Eldritch*. You know what *eldritch* means?' or 'I was spawned uncounted aeons ago, in the dark mists of Khhaa'yngnaiih (no, of course I don't know how to spell it. Write it as it sounds)' reveal, through their parody,

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[97] Further parodic subversions of the genre include the chosen one 'un-choosing' himself (Adam decides not to be the Antichrist), the fact that the ones who save the world are not the main characters (Crowley and Aziraphale) but the secondary characters (Anathema and Newton), and several characters' or the narrative voice's comedic awareness of fantasy narrative conventions and fantasy texts (one of Adam's friends is called Pipin Galadriel Moonchild, for example).

awareness of the usage of language in Lovecraft's gothic fantasies.[98] Other Gaiman

stories that appear parodic at first glance, like 'The Case of the Four and Twenty

Blackbirds', which contains comical or ironic lines ("I'm Jill Dumpty." "So your

brother was Humpty Dumpty?" "And he didn't fall off that wall, Mr Horner. He was

pushed."), are also more accurately described in terms of their fantasy-retelling

and/or pastiching dynamics.[99]

More parodic in structure is 'The Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves in the

Secret House of the Night of Dread Desire', in which the unnamed protagonist is a

writer in a Gothic-based reality where butlers lurk, evil twins leap out from behind

secret panels, ravens deliver ominous pronouncements, and the undead return to

haunt the living. The writer bemoans his writing style (an already metafictional

gesture) because while he desires to produce works that portray reality (i.e. gothic

reality) he finds himself succumbing to parody. Several metafictive and

metafantastic levels are at play. In the first narrative level, the story parodies gothic

writing: the story that the protagonist is writing as well as the protagonist's life

exhibit exaggerated and pointed imitations of stereotypical gothic writing. The title

alone, in fact, already informs the reader of the Gothic/Poe-like/Hammer-Horror

parody to follow, and the opening paragraph's setting 'away in the deep forest

behind the house, [where] night-things whooped and skrarked' confirms this.

Gaiman's parody – the referential imitation – is so extreme that the later mentions of

[98] Gaiman, 'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar', *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. 147-159 (p. 153); 'I, Cthulhu, or What's a Tentacle-Faced Thing Like Me Doing in A Sunken City Like This (Latitude 47° 9' S, Longitude 126° 43' W)?', *Dagon*, 16 (1987), pp. 7-10 (p. 7).
[99] Gaiman, 'The Case of the Four and Twenty Blackbirds', in *Angels and Visitations* (Minneapolis, MN: DreamHaven Books, 1993), pp. 93-107.

'the classics—*Udolpho, The Castle of Otranto, The Saragossa Manuscript, The Monk,* and the rest of them' can almost be regarded as redundancy.

In any case, the parody is intertextually signalling to previous narratives outside of the fiction, demonstrating its metafictiveness, but because it is referencing a type of fiction that is already largely metafictional – where it concerns supernatural/fantastic gothic fiction – and specifically criticising the dynamics of utilising fantastic gothic elements to tell stories, the narrative becomes meta-metafictive, i.e. metafantastic. The story also exhibits other kinds of metafantasy behaviour, such as awareness of the genre's tropes as well as of the genre's propensity for forming recognisable tropes. When the protagonist begins to consider writing 'fantasy' instead of realist fiction (the opposite if viewed from the perspective of the actual world) the narrative informs the reader that:

> He rolled the stock themes of fantasy over in his mind: cars and stockbrokers and commuters, housewives and police, agony columns and commercials for soap, income tax and cheap restaurants, magazines and credit cards and streetlights and computers…[100]

The fact that these are not the tropes of fantasy from the perspective of the actual world reveals that there is such a thing as a distinction between the actual world and the fiction, that there is such a thing as fantasy tropes that fantasy readers from the actual world should be able to recognize, and that the narrative is consciously playing with all of these levels of awareness. By inverting what the protagonist considers reality and fantasy through a transformative parody, Gaiman is able to

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[100] Gaiman, 'The Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves in the Secret House of the Night of Dread Desire', in *Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders*, by Neil Gaiman (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), pp. 47-62 (pp. 59-60).

comment on fantasy writing: on one hand "'Fantasy isn't life. Esoteric dreams, written by a minority for a minority'" and on the other "'It is escapism, true," he said, aloud. "But is not the highest impulse in mankind the urge toward freedom, the drive to escape?"'[101]

Nonetheless, Gaiman's diversity and versatility is what makes it difficult to establish clear-cut distinctions between his styles and modes. As a work that showcases his wide ranging skills and metafictive (and metafantastical) interest, *The Sandman* is also an ideal example of metafantasy parody's capacity to bare the illusion for the fantastic, while still reconstituting it into different functions, also for the purposes of the fantastic story. An example of this is the inclusion of the *Infinity, Inc* superhero Hector Hall – the second Sandman, after Jack Kirby and Joe Simon's original Garrett Sandford, – who does not exist for the sake of mocking the original but the plot's: In the twelfth *Sandman* issue, 'Playing House', Hall and his wife Hippolyta Trevor live in a separate aspect of the Dreaming – Morpheus' domain – where Hall believes he is the real Sandman. The use of the colourful costume and phrases like '[this is] the man who rescued the Tooth Fairy from the Jovian Fish-Men. Who stopped the Big Bad Wolf from huffing down the Chrysler Building [...] Nobody ever beats the Sandman' is satirical, but Gaiman's inclusion of this historical version of the Sandman, though mildly parodic, does not exist for the sake of comedy or parody in and of itself.[102]

Instead, its inclusion is carefully crafted into the overarching narrative and, though Gaiman was writing each issue practically individually, it became one of the pivotal

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[101] Gaiman, 'Forbidden Brides', pp. 59, 60.
[102] Gaiman, 'Playing House', *Doll's House*, The Sandman Series, 12 (1997), p. 3.

details in the unfolding events at the end of the series. The re-combining of the parodic allusion with elements external to that allusion – not plucked anachronistically for their own sake as occurs in *Bored of the Rings*, but interwoven to create something new that can subsist independent of its intertextual connections is the mark of a successful parody, and therefore of a successful metafantasy as well. That is not to say that there is not an intrinsic need for the recognition of an operating intertext, but that the knowledge of the components of the intertext (or ignorance of them) does not prevent or preclude the reader from recognizing that an allusion is being made. In the *Sandman* example, the reader might not know the details of the original Sandman heroes, but possess enough knowledge of the comic book medium and superhero genre intertext to recognise it as a reference to it. The same is applicable to the reader of 'Faceless Brides', for instance, and the fantasy gothic genre, or the *Good Omens* reader with the religious fantasy and horror genres.

Conclusions

Parodies of fantasy are a form of metafantasy, that is, one of the ways in which the genre of fantasy (as well as other fantastic subgenres) is examined via the very genre it belongs to or via its elements. Because of fantasy's inherent metafictive structure, parodies perform a deconstructive doubling. Parody's necessary awareness of its function offers commentary on the conscious doublethink processes of the genre of fantasy. In engaging with parodies of fantasy, Gaiman and other metafantasy writers are able to criticize and comment on the genre (its tropes and the cultural perceptions drawn from it), and revitalize it by offering new perspectives on how to

construct and read fantasy stories as well as through the combination of fantasy

elements with non-fantastic ones.

Chapter 3: Metafantasy and Neil Gaiman – A Practical Study

Section 1: Gaiman and Pastiche

In Darnell Schweitzer's 2000 interview with Neil Gaiman, he describes the author as a 'Lovecraftian humorist', an appropriate title given the comedic quality of most of his Lovecraft spins.[1] Yet, while 'I, Cthulhu' (1986) and 'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar' (1998) are humorous in nature and intent, his other two incursions into the Cthulhu Mythos, 'Only the End of the World Again' (1994) and 'Study in Emerald' (2003), are not.[2] The way in which Gaiman treats the original sources in general – part imitation, part reference, part recombination of- and with- different stories, both Lovecraftian and otherwise, is more than merely for the sake of comedy or parody. This is not to say that the stories do not contain parodic elements, but that when seen as a whole – as Gaiman's incursions into a long-standing tradition of dabbling with the Lovecraftian Mythos – the stories fall more accurately on a spectrum, a gradient that goes from mostly parodic to stricter imitation. What distinguishes them, in the end, is how they unite external elements (the awareness of Lovecraft, of other non-Lovecraft pastiches, of non-Lovecraftian horror, and non-horror fiction/media/etc) into the stories. Because of this, though these short stories can be placed on gradient scale between serious satire and parody, they can overall be best described as 'pastiches'.

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[1] Darrell Schweitzer, 'Another Interview With Neil Gaiman', in *The Neil Gaiman Reader*, ed. by Darrell Schweitzer (Rockville, MD: Wildside Press LLC, 2007), pp. 175-189 (p. 176).
[2] It should be noted that of the four stories, only 'Study in Emerald' had not been published by the time of Schweitzer's interview.

Defining Pastiche

The term pastiche is difficult to define accurately because while it is widely used in literary circles, criticism and theory, it is seldom actively defined. It is generally accepted as both 'a work, esp. of literature, created in the style *of* someone or something else' and 'the technique of incorporating distinctive elements of other works or styles in a literary composition, design, etc'. [3] In literary terms then, pastiche is separated into two forms: the imitation and the amalgamation. It should also be noted that in the latter, a degree of imitation, however slight, would also be required as an 'amalgam of different styles' still necessitates the author's skill at mimicking another's voice.

In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson states that pastiche is distinct from parody in that although it shares in its 'imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style', its intrinsic purpose is not necessarily that of humour or satire. [4] Jameson does concede, offhandedly, that pastiche is capable of humour, but he emphasises its relationship to the readership – in his case 'the consumers'. Pastiche's 'passion', he argues, 'is compatible with addiction', by which he means the 'consumer's appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself'. [5] The notion of 'addiction' or 'appetite' for a world constructed out of images of itself illustrates the fannish quality that fuels genre pastiche wherein the text not only imitates a style but where its primary purpose is imitation for its own sake – for the pleasure of reflecting specific images, language, settings and styles. If

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[3] *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2015), <http://www.oed.com/> [accessed 27 August 2015].

[4] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 17.

[5] Jameson, p. 18.

this is the case, then pastiche, depending on whether it is regarded as an imitation or amalgamation, requires more (if imitative) or less (if amalgamative) explicit (trans)textual connections to the reader's awareness than parody. Some critics contend that pastiche is a less overt form of metafictive baring because, in seeking to imitate, it is not opening critical dialogues with the reader, while the parody cannot escape baring the distinction between it and the original. Linda Hutcheon argues, rebuking Jameson's dismissiveness of parody in postmodernism, that parody occurs when the enslaving ties of imitation needed in the pastiche are cut, and the parody text is free to '[repeat] with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heard of similarity', implying that pastiche, on the other hand, lacks that self-same critical distance.[6] David Herman explores this stance, commenting that:

> Hutcheon, unlike Jameson, can acknowledge the postmodern intensification of moral uncertainty while still preserving a distinction between parody and pastiche. What Hutcheon's discussion implies, ultimately, is that parody, in order to function, need not proceed from a stable center or closed system of values; in fact, parody marks the threshold at which art invests pastiche with broadly emancipatory energies.[7]

In the *Cambridge Companion to Fantasy*, Jim Casey makes a similar, if more straightforward observation saying that where parodies like Gaiman and Pratchett's '*Good Omens* […], the film *Mystery Men* (1999) or the internet movie *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008) fail without an audience's awareness of the hypotext, […] pasticcios like Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*

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[6] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 26.
[7] David J. Herman, 'Modernism versus Postmodernism: Toward an Analytic Distinction', in *A Postmodern Reader*, ed. by Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 157-192 (pp. 170-171).

(1999-) benefit from but do not require knowledge of the work's inspiration'.[8]

However, when it comes to a form like metafantasy where it is the genre being

placed under examination or being used to do the metafictive deconstructions, the

same distinctions between parody and pastiche cannot be maintained. Where a

parody of a specific author's work would require very specific knowledge to spot

the references and understand the humour, parodies of fantasy, by incorporating the

entire genre (or subgenres) perform broader transtextually derived parodies. They

respond to perceptions of genre, not only specific works, even when those

perceptions appear to be ascribed to specific texts. For example, in Diana Wynne

Jones' *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* names are cut in half and the gaps are filled

with apostrophes to hide true names so that most names are not considered complete

unless they are interrupted by an apostrophe in the middle:

> NAMES are very important in Fantasyland, […] almost nobody tells anyone
> else what their Name really is, for fear of its being used in a SPELL to
> enslave them. [Many] adopt the expedient of cutting out half their Names
> and filling the gaps with APOSTROPHES, as in Ka'a Orto'o.

> Few names in Fantasyland are considered complete unless they are
> interrupted by an apostrophe somewhere in the middle (as in Gna'ash).[9]

It might be natural for a passing reader to assume that this is parodying Tolkien – the

quintessential fantasy text – however such naming conventions do not appear

anywhere in the Legendarium. Instead, it is necessary to turn to Lovecraft, Roger

Zelazny, *Dungeons&Dragons*, and Anne McCaffrey – the latter especially – for

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[8] Jim Casey, 'Modernism and postmodernism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 113-124 (p. 122).
[9] Diana Wynne Jones, *Touch Guide to Fantasyland* (London: Gollancz, 1996), pp. 12, 145-146.

such practices. Nonetheless, it is the convention that is being referenced – the genre

perception – producing an aware-commentary rendition of an already metafictive

form. Similarly, readers can knowingly identify when genre perceptions are being

referenced (for example, in *Good Omens*, they can identify the children-club

structure frequently used in children/young adult fantasy/adventure narratives) as

well as knowingly identify specific parodic imitation (for instance, the direct parody

of the *Just William* books).[10]

With pastiche, the opposite then occurs; where in the first-level pastiche – the strict

imitation – the reader's knowledge of the transtext need not be so specific as to

prompt them to identify the changes and allusions being made but instead be taken

in by the imitation, as Casey suggested (consider the Lovecraftian pastiches that will

be discussed ahead, as well as Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and simulacra),

in the second-level pastiche – the pastiche of a metafictive genre – there is a need for

the reader's awareness to be much more attuned to the purposeful imitation and

deviation from the original. Such parodies call into attention the place of the original

within a genre-pastiching tradition.

The traditional pastiche abides by the source material, imitating and recombining it

(amalgamation with other imitable elements). More than requiring knowledge of the

subject being imitated then, pastiche induces a deeper familiarity, even sentimental

relationship, to its source(s), for the narrative has to feel to the reader, to some

degree, as the original would. The pastiche of fantasy, on the other hand, reveals

deeper intentionality – the author is not taking up a voice in order to say something

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[10] Consider other examples, such as from the Discworld series: the witches archetypes present in fantasy versus the specific references to *Macbeth*, or the barbarian horde stereotype versus the specific *Conan the Barbarian* allusions.

in that voice, but for the conscious pleasure of using that voice, and all parties involved, both reader and writer, are aware of this playacting attempt. This enables the writer to explore a variety of tones, from the serious to the playful. Where a traditional pastiche narrative might strictly imitate another in order to produce a work that is indistinguishable from the original even though the mimetic dynamic is at the heart of the production, the meta-metafictive pastiche imitates and sets itself apart simultaneously. Because of this, a certain naiveté could be ascribed to the traditional pastiche, though to claim they completely lack awareness of the hypotext and ironic simulation is to do pasticheurs like Lin Carter, Philip José Farmer, or Ramsey Campbell a disservice.[11] Carter's Thongor of Valkarth, the barbarian from the lost continent of Lemuria, for instance, is certainly a pastiche of Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* series (for which Carter would also later write) imitating it in an attempt to capture the essence of the original even as it alters it into something new or different.

Both the pastiche that mimics aspects of characters, themes, and settings, and the pastiche that aspires to pass entirely as the original are engaging in the type of traditional pastiche (albeit, one that contains fantasy or fantastic elements) that Hutcheon and others discuss. Degrees of awareness are then, as said, naturally inescapable; when writing and reading about Bob Byrd's Ka-Zar (1936) or John Peter Drummond's Ki-Gor (1939), for example, implied intertextual connections to Edgar Rice Burrough's *Tarzan* (1914) and its film and television adaptations would be unavoidable.[12] However, there is a noticeable difference in the pointed knowing

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[11] For a discussion on Carter and Campbell's Lovecraftian pastiches, see section below.

[12] Bob Byrd, *King of Fang and Claw: The Complete Pulp Magazine* (Boston, MA: Altus Press, 2008); John Peter Drummond and Tom Johnson, *Ki-Gor: The Complete Series Volume 1* (Boston, MA: Altus Press, 2009); Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

awareness of the metatextual narrative (not merely the intertextual connections) that sets apart texts such as Farmer's *Tarzan Alive* (1972) and *Lord Tyger* (1970) novels (or even more, *The Peerless Peer* (1974) novel that pastiches Tarzan and Holmes) and Gaiman's narratives discussed ahead, a difference that largely lies in what is actually being pastiched.[13]

Fantasy Pastiche

Pastiche in fantasy is not a widely studied topic despite being called by Casey 'one of the most visible forms of the late postmodern fantasy'.[14] Hazel Pierce's 'Pastiche Fantasy' echoes Jameson when she remarks that it is something readers take to and consume with an appetite.[15] She also draws attention to the frequency of pastiche being found in the 'popular genres': 'Gothic novel, speculative fiction, detective-mystery story, the western, even some contemporary mainstream work – [all] offer literary style, characterisation, settings, themes, language as raw material for the imitation so vital to pastiche-fantasy'.[16] However, she also likens it to satire, parody and mimicry, from which, as seen, it should be differentiated. Pierce's article, while problematic for its inclusion of non-fantasy texts, nevertheless hits upon some pertinent characteristics of the form, and sheds light on why it is so attractive, particularly within the fantastic genres.[17] Pastiche of fantasy has the capacity to offer

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[13] Many of Farmer's Tarzan pastiches, especially the parodies of the genre and his own pastiches, reflects the type of double metafiction (meta-metafiction) that is present in metafantasy. See, for example, the pastiche of Tarzan written as William Burroughs ('The Jungle –Rot Kid on the Nod'), or *A Feast Unknown* – a satire of pulp fiction and erotica that contains a pastiche of Farmer's own Newton Wold universe.

[14] Casey, p. 122.

[15] Hazel Pierce, 'Pastiche Fantasy', *Fantasy Newsletter*, 6 (1983), 19-20 (p. 19).

[16] Pierce. p. 19.

[17] She cites Robert Bloch's 'A Most Unusual Murder' (1976), which is a science fiction pastiche; the same is true of Arthur Byron Cover's *An East Wind Coming* (1979), Philip José Farmer's *Venus on the Half-Shell* (1975), and several others.

renewed experiences and a fresh twist, however ephemeral, of a 'person's uniqueness, style [and] **modus operandi**'[18]. It allows authors like Philip José Farmer, who Pierce references extensively, to freely mix real and fictional people in his fictions while honouring the author(s) imitated. In addition, it can be regarded as a 'tool for social comment' in some hands – though Pierce's examples hardly reflect this – or as 'a toy for the sheer enjoyment of the imitative exercise'.[19]

The *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* also uses the term pastiche frequently, and while it does not contain an entry defining it, it does provide some examples of works that complement the previously identified characteristics: 'the act of imitating an author's voice for the sake of writing continuing stories set in a given universe or using specific characters' – the, as seen, traditional form of the pastiche.[20] It is interesting to note that, from the majority of examples, the *Encyclopedia*'s stance on pastiche emphasises its mimetic qualities over its amalgamative tendencies. Nevertheless, despite lacking an entry for pastiche, the entries on RECURSIVE FANTASY and SEQUELS BY OTHER HANDS prove to be describing very similar structures within the genre, the former in particular emphasising its requirement that it 'deal with a *specific* former fiction, [exploiting existing matter as] stories set in the universe of […] the previous story'.[21] In essence, the key factor that distinguishes these types of fantasy pastiches from pastiches of fantasy lies in the purpose of taking up another author's voice and whether the

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[18] Pierce, p. 19. Emphasis in original.
[19] Pierce, p. 19.
[20] The *EF*'s examples include Andrew Lang and Walter Herries Pollock's *He* – an H. Rider Haggard pastiche, as well as Lang's other Haggard pastiches, several Lovecraftian-pastiche authors, who will be mentioned later, Sherlock Holmes pastiches, and Moorcock's *Warriors of Mars* which pastiches Burroughs, among others.
[21] David Langford, 'Recursive Fantasy', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1997), p. 805-806 (p. 805).

imitation/amalgamation is commenting on the genre and its metatext through the act of pastiching instead of a single author or text.

This kind of genre-centric pastiching can be appreciated in small-scale through Gaiman's interactions with the gothic cosmic fantasy horror of Lovecraft and the traditions and readerly-responsive fandoms associated with it.

Neil Gaiman and Pastiche: Tradition of Lovecraftian Pastiches

The tradition of pastiching Lovecraft's gothic horror tales is a long one, as it begun even while Lovecraft was writing his tales. In *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos*, Lin Carter offers some historical background to how the extensive and expansive universe of the Mythos came to be thanks to the pastiche contributions of writers after Lovecraft:

> At first, it was only some of Lovecraft's closest friends and correspondents who wrote new stories in his Mythos […]. And today [1976], writers who never knew him and in some cases were not even born until after his death, are writing new chapters in the history of the Cthulhu Mythos.[22]

However, despite being, overall, 'pastiches', Gaiman's Lovecraftian narratives are noticeably different from the majority of the stories and novels written within the extended universe of the Cthulhu Mythos that have also been called 'Lovecraftian Pastiches'. Lin Carter's stories, for instance, attempt to maintain Lovecraft's voice and style as well as his ominous, foreboding tone. 'The Red Offering', for example,

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[22] Lin Carter, *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. xviii.

contained in his *Xothic Legend Cycle: The Complete Mythos Fiction of Lin Carte*, adequately reflects Lovecraft's style:

> From my earliest youth, I, Zanthu, had considered myself a devotee of mighty Ythogtha, the Abomination in the Abyss, and even dared aspire to the highest position in what remnants remained of the cult of that Dark Divinity, in whose service the founders of my house had prospered and had waxed prestigious in the land of G'thuu, northernmost of the nine realms into which the continent of Mu was divided.[23]

As the aforementioned scholars of postmodern have suggested of pastiche, there is little to no critical distance, subversion, or commentary being performed by Carter in these stories. Even in the most dramatic and easily parodiable scenes, there is little to no inkling of any subverting intention. Compare the following passages from Carter's 'The Dweller in the Tomb' with Lovecraft's famous 'Call of Cthulhu':

> Terrible, fragmentary legends of weird, inhuman shapes shambling amid the unbroken snow of poplar summits, threshing tentacles in the moonlight, shrill ululations that come from no human or bestial throat – gliding pillars of quaking protoplasmic jelly, somehow strayed from other worlds and far dimensions – what is that awful passage from the nightmare pages of the *Necronomicon* about "portals to Beyond, and Things from Outside that sometimes stray through the shadowy Gates to stalk through earthly snows" […].[24]

And:

> Animal fury and orgiastic license here whipped themselves to daemoniac heights by howls and squawking ecstasies that tore and reverberated through those nighted woods like pestilential tempests from the gulfs of hell. Now and then the less organized ululation would cease, and from what seemed a

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[23] Carter, 'The Red Offering', in *The Xothic Legend Cycle: The Complete Mythos Fiction of Lin Carter* (Hayward, CA: Chaosium Inc., 1997), pp. 1-5 (p. 2).
[24] Carter, 'The Dweller in the Tomb', in *The Xothic Legend Cycle*, pp. 6-16 (p. 13).

well-drilled chorus of hoarse voices would rise in sing-song chant that
hideous phrase or ritual:

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn."[25]

Carter imitates the elaborate adjectival syntax, the sublime-grotesque imagery, and
the practice of referencing fictitious transtexts in order to produce the feeling of
ancient horror that Lovecraft employs. The following example shows the insane
ramblings of one of Lovecraft's own characters when faced with a cosmic horror
followed by Carter's echo of a similar encounter:

> The Thing cannot be described – there is no language for such abysms of
> shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter,
> force, and cosmic order. A mountain walked or stumbled. God! What
> wonder that across the earth a great architect went mad, and poor Wilcox
> raved with fever in that telepathic instant?[26]

And:

> God! I am mad or going mad… cannot endure for much longer these
> torments of the mind, body and soul… near the limits of my strength and
> sanity… last three bearers half-insane themselves with superstitious fear by
> now; have to drive them on before me all day at gun-point…[27]

In addition, the use of the awkward names (as seen in the 'Red Offering' example)
and overly dramatic outbursts is not intentionally comic or allusive though it is
responsible for contemporary ironic responses and perceptions of Lovecraftian
fiction – perceptions Gaiman later exploits.[28] Carter does not offer commentary on
his imitative process or reveal the pastiche nature of the story through the story

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[25] H. (Howard) P. (Phillips) Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu', in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 139-169 (p. 152).
[26] Lovecraft, 'Call of Cthulhu', p. 167.
[27] Ellipses in original. Carter, 'Dweller in the Tomb', p. 13.
[28] See Will Murray's article in *Crypt of Cthulhu* on Lovecraft's ghost-written 'revised' stories and the apparent if non-verifiable parody in them. ['Self-Parody in Lovecraft's Revisions', *Crypt of Cthulhu*, 2 (Hallowmas 1983), pp. 22-24.]

itself. In other words, while there is a necessary underlying metafictive structure in Carter's pastiches – given the inherent intertextual connections brought upon by the act of imitation – it is, at best, subtextual. The reader is not being invited into the intertextual dynamic, invited neither to reflect on Lovecraft's fiction nor on the process of pastiche, despite the knowledge of the difference in authors. Neither would a lack of in-depth knowledge of the Cthulhu Mythos prevent them from understanding the pastiches. There are some pasticheurs who intimate about that mimetic process by inserting Lovecraft into the fiction – a practice much more subtly done by Lovecraft himself – such as in August Derleth's 'The House on Curwen Street: being The Manuscript of Andrew Phelan', where Phelan recounts the various tales of Dr. Shrewsbury including one about:

> [the] curious illness which removed from the terrestrial scene—after the publication of tales purporting to be fiction, and revealing progressively more and more about the Cthulhu-Nyarlathotep-Great Old Ones cults, particularly the hellishly revelatory novel, *At the Mountains of Madness*, hinting at strange terrible survivals in arctic wastes—that great modern master of the macabre, H. P. Lovecraft.[29]

This is similar to the equally prolific Sherlock Holmes pastiches where authors place Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the same pseudo-realist fictional level as his creations, along with other famous writers and historical figures. However, while this type of reference in pastiche can be interpreted as an explicit nod to the reader, it is not intrinsically about either laying the genre bare or commenting on its metatext. Gaiman, conversely, demonstrates an awareness of the pastiching process every step of the way as a result of his fabulist, and more importantly, genre-conscious

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[29] August Derleth, 'The House on Curwen Street: being The Manuscript of Andrew Phelan', in *The Trail of Cthulhu* (Guilford, Surrey: Arkham House, 1974), pp. 1-47 (13-14).

approach to fiction. The difference lies in the fact that while both Gaiman and the other Lovecraftian writers are undoubtedly writing pastiches, Gaiman is not writing from within the Mythos, but from outside it, or more precisely, from within a different circle that contains both the Mythos and the metatextual and hypertextual conventions of and responses to the Mythos.

In *A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos*, Carter specifies his parameters for deciding which of Lovecraft's stories can be classified as 'belonging in the Mythos' and which do not. He states that they 'must present us with a significant item of information about the background lore of the Mythos, thus contributing important information to a common body of lore'.[30] If this is a necessary distinction for Lovecraft's own fiction, then the same should apply to the traditional pastiches; they must attempt, or appear to attempt, to contribute to the established lore. This is the difference between, for instance, Ramsey Campbell's early Lovecraftian pastiches like the stories collection *The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants*, which contribute to the Mythos by inventing additional fictional books, gods, and locations, and his later horror stories that contain allusions and influences from Lovecraft, but are not expanding the universe of any of his Mythos.[31] Gaiman, on the other hand, is not trying to offer serious contribution to the Mythos but to Story; that is, he is exploiting it in order to tell a story, one that is best told as a Lovecraft story by mining Lovecraftian pastiching elements, in order to say something about the construction of Lovecraftian stories and readerly perceptions of that tradition.

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[30] Carter, *A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos*, pp. 26-27.

[31] In Campbell's introduction to *The Inhabitant of the Lake*, he explains how his early writings were 'little more than amateurish pastiches of Lovecraft's tales' because he wanted, directly and explicitly, 'to add to the Mythos'. Ramsey Campbell, *The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants*, (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1964), p. 1.

Gaiman pastiches can be divided into two broad categories: ones that pastiche the mimetic aspect of Lovecraftian pastiches (i.e., they seek to imitate the language and setting of his fiction even as they call attention to the tradition they spawned and are part of), and ones that pastiche the amalgamative aspect of the pastiches (by combining them with genres that also call attention to the pastiching tradition). In other words, they are pastiches of the Lovecraftian pastiching tradition, be it the imitative aspect or the combination aspect of it. Into the first category fall 'I, Cthulhu' and 'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar', and into the second 'Only the End of the World Again' and 'A Study in Emerald'. 'I, Cthulhu' was published in *Dagon* #16 in 1987, with a follow-up mock-editorial addition in the next issue. Its full title is 'I, Cthulhu, or What's a Tentacle-Faced Thing Like Me Doing in A Sunken City Like This (Latitude 47° 9' S, Longitude 126° 43' W)?'and it is written in the style of an interview between the cosmic abomination Cthulhu and the human Whateley.[32] In it, Cthulhu recounts his early life and his hopes and plans for the future as part of his memoirs.

'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar', published in 1998, follows Ben Lassiter, a tourist named visiting the fictional English town of Innsmouth.[33] There he comes across a pub named the Saloon Bar, after skipping the pubs 'Book of the Dead' and 'Public Bar', and meets two strange characters named Wilf and Seth – later identified as two acolytes of dead Cthulhu – who convince him to try the drink 'Shoggoth's Old

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[32] This is likely 'crazy Old Whateley' from 'The Dunwich Horror' and not his grandson Wilbur given how Cthulhu considers Whateley to be human, whereas Wilbur is the offspring of Lavinia (Old Whateley's daughter) and Yog-Sothoth. Cthulhu at one point comments 'You've met Yog-Sothoth, have you not, my little two-legged beastie? I thought as much', which could be a reference to Whateley's ill-begotten grandson, or merely to 'The Dunwich Horror' as a whole. (Gaiman, 'I, Cthulhu', p. 7).

[33] A reference to how Lovecraft's fictional Dunwich is theorized to have been a reference to the British one.

Peculiar'. They proceed to rant about 'H. bloody P. bloody Love bloody craft', his convoluted language, and about how they do not have much 'acolytin' to do while Cthulhu dreams.[34]

On the other hand, 'Only the End of the World Again', published in 1994, combines the Mythos with the genres of hard-boiled detective fiction as well as with modern supernatural gothic fantasy (werewolves and vampires). It centres on Lawrence Talbot, a lycanthropic 'adjustor' recently arrived in Innsmouth (the fictional American one) as he uncovers a cult to the Great Old Ones and experiences yet another abortive end of the world. Finally, 'A Study in Emerald', published in 2003, combines Conan Doyle's Holmesian stories with Lovecraft, depicting an alternate universe where the Great Old Ones rose, conquered Europe, and instituted themselves as rulers (Queen Victoria is a cosmic abomination herself). The main characters are called to solve the murder of one of the German princes, similar to the original 'Study in Scarlet', and proceed to use various methods of deduction and scientific investigation to solve it.

I - Pastiching the Mimetic Lovecraftian Pastiching Tradition

Both 'I, Cthulhu' and 'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar' draw particular attention to Lovecraft as a writer, and the transtextual quality of the metatextually-fabricated Mythos. For instance, in the first, Cthulhu acknowledges Ambrose Bierce's Carcosa, Robert W. Chambers' *King in Yellow*, Chambers himself, Robert Bloch's fictional grimoire *De Vermis Mysteriis* as well as Lovecraft's *The Necronomicon*, as all

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[34] Neil Gaiman, 'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar', in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman (New York: Avon Books, 1998), pp. 147-159 (pp. 152, 155).

existing textually (though the reader knows it is actually metatextually), and in 'Shoggoth' Wilf and Seth comment extensively on Lovecraft's usage of words like 'gibbous', 'eldritch', and 'squamous'. The mentions of other authors who influenced Lovecraft and who participated in the promulgation of Lovecraftian pastiches serves to inform the reader that the story is referencing not just Lovecraft but an entire metatext. Both stories allude to the fannish culture that revolves around the Mythos, mimetically celebrating but not mocking the awareness of elements like the use of absurdly florid language and unpronounceable names.[35] What is interesting to note is how, despite this outsider perspective, the stories are still mimetic enough so as to be confused for conventional Lovecraftian pastiches by someone with little knowledge of the tradition, readership, and the fan/readerly culture being referenced. For example, in an article on Gaiman's mythological retellings, Harley J. Sims mistakenly compares these pastiches to what Gaiman does with the DC universe (DCU), saying that he 'add[s] biographical depth to several of the Old Ones and their spawn', though other than Cthulhu and the Old Ones he numbers as his friends, none of the characters that feature in the stories (neither of the four in fact) are part of the Mythos nor would be considered to be.[36]

Gaiman is not contributing to the Mythos in the same way that he contributes to the mythos of the DCU with the *Sandman*. There is no serious biographical depth being added to the Old Ones, unless one was to accept a sentimental Cthulhu who pines

[35] For examples of the critical and fan-driven debates on this, see S.T. Joshi's explanatory note in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, where he mentions Lovecraft's own differing, and even contradictory accounts over the pronunciation of 'Cthulhu', or Robert M. Price's detailed essay printed in *Dagon*. [S.T. Joshi, *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (London, Penguin Books, 1999), p. 395 (note 9); Robert M. Price, 'Mythos Names and How to Pronounce Them', *Dagon*, 15 (Nov/Dec 1986), 3-7.]
[36] Harley J. Sims, 'Consorting with the Gods: Exploring Gaiman's Pan-pantheon', in *The Mythological Dimensions of Neil Gaiman*, ed. by Anthony S. Burdge, Jessica Burke, and Kristine Larsen (Crawford, FL: Kistune Books, 2012), pp. 94-108 (p. 98).

for the apocalypse and finds humans revolting as canonical. Cthulhu's description of them, 'Old Ones […], Funny chaps. Like great starfish-headed barrels, with filmy great wings that they fly through space with', is not providing actual background to Lovecraft's universe as much as commenting about it from the perspective of an outsider familiar with Lovecraft's fiction and the Mythos. The same applies to Gaiman's other pastiches; the disappearing Innsmouth north of Bootle, where batrachian acolytes Wilf and Seth await for Cthulhu to awaken allows Gaiman to comment on the stereotypical language and style of Lovecraft's stories, but plot- and Mythos-wise, nothing of note occurs. Even 'Only the End of the World Again' and 'A Study in Emerald', cannot be taken as serious incursions into the Mythos either, despite their much less satirical tones.

They stand outside it in the same way that the readership of Lovecraft and the pastiches stand outside it, yet they are simultaneously within the metafictive sphere that encompasses not only Lovecraft and his transtextually constructed Mythos, but the entirety of the cult following. This concern with readerly genre perceptions manifests itself in both the parodic aspect that critically reflects and the pastiche aspect that critically imitates those metatextual traditions and responses.[37] The first, the parodic aspect, is easy to identify, as when Cthulhu says: 'I was spawned uncounted aeons ago, in the dark mists of Khhaa'yngnaiih (no, of course I don't know how to spell it. Write it as it sounds)'.[38] The second, the pastiching aspect, is seen in the conscious imitation of the expectation of Lovecraftian language:

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[37] Both the parodic and pastiching aspects of these two stories are acknowledged.
[38] See note 35 as well as Robert M. Price's earlier essay (under the pseudonym Henry Akeley) 'Cthul-Who?: How Do You Pronounce 'Cthulhu'?', *Crypt of Cthulhu*, 9 (Hollowmas 1982), p. 3. See also Edmund Wilson's essay 'Tales of the Marvellous and Ridiculous' for negative criticism of Lovecraft's style and language in *H.P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism*, ed. by S.T. Joshi (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), pp. 46-49.

I sit here, dead and dreaming, watching the ant-empires of man rise and fall, tower and crumble.

One day – perhaps it will come tomorrow, perhaps in more tomorrows than your feeble mind can encompass – the stars will be rightly conjoined in the heavens, and the time of destruction shall be upon us: I shall rise from the deep and I shall have dominion over the world once more.

Riot and revel, blood-food and foulness, eternal twilight and nightmare and the screams of the dead and the not-dead and the chant of the faithful.

And after?

I shall leave this plane, when this world is a cold cinder orbitting a lightless sun. I shall return to my own place, where the blood drips nightly down the face of a moon that bulges like the eye of a drowned sailor, and I shall estivate.[39]

Unlike the examples from Carter or Derleth whose imitation of the language comes from the intention of writing within the Mythos, Gaiman is imitating the language for the purpose of pointing it out, not parodically but because it is fannishly expected, especially considering it was published in the Lovecraftian fanzine *Dagon*. Aimed at 'readers of the Cthulhu Mythos and players of *Call of Cthulhu*', the fanzine exemplifies the state of awareness over the act of recycling, reusing, and utterly revelling in Lovecraftian and Lovecraftian-like stories that began to grow in the 1980s. The publication, along with those mentioned in the note below, helped spurn a highly self-aware fannish cult following that has striven to adapt and adopt the Mythos into all other forms of media and text. This ranges from the

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[39] Gaiman, 'I, Cthulu: Or What's A Tentacle-Faced Thing Like Me Doing In A Sunken City Like This (Latitude 47º 9'S, Longitude 126º 43'W)?', *Dagon*, 16 (1987), 7-10 (p. 10).

whimsification of various cosmic horrors into such products as the *Littlest Lovecraft*

illustrated book series and even a number of pastiches with the animated show *My*

Little Pony (*MLP*), to an increase in the creation and sale of Cthulhu plush toys,

clothing, accessories, and craft projects. To this is added games such as the

aforementioned *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game by Chaosium in 1981, the card

games *Mythos* (1996) and *Call of Cthulhu: The Card Game* (2008), and the board

games *Arkham Horror* (1987) and *Eldritch Horror* (2013), among countless

others.[40] Furthermore, there exist several parodic and pastiching films, television

references, songs, and even musical productions like the H. P. Lovecraft Historical

Society's *A Shoggoth on the Roof* (2005) and their Christmas album *A Very Scary*

Solstice (2003).

The self-awareness of the dichotomy between the unknown abominations portrayed

in the original stories and early pastiches like Derleth's, Carter's, and even

Campbell's, and the contradictory innocence and harmlessness implied by these

pastiches and iterations is unmistakeable. An extreme example is the *My Little*

Pony: Friendship is Magic fanfiction page *FIMFiction*, which hosts a group called

'The Library of Lovecraftian and Lovecraft-inspired Fiction' that simultaneously

proclaims to be 'the home of true horror […] sophisticated horror', as well as the

home of retellings and crossovers of 'HP Lovecraft [stories], but set in the pony

universe' such as 'The Call of Cthulhu, retold with ponies' or a story in which

'Twilight Sparkle [an *MLP* character] and randoph [sic] Carter go adventuring

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[40] See *HPLovecraft.com* <http://www.hplovecraft.com/popcult/games/board.aspx> for a list of
Lovecraftian board and card games [accessed 20 July 2015].

through the dreamlands together'.[41] The incompatibility of these two fandoms is precisely what makes these stories appealing to a reader with interests in both, in the same way that Lovecraft and Conan Doyle are combined in Gaiman's (and others) pastiche (discussed ahead).[42]

This awareness was already present in the fandom when Gaiman wrote 'I, Cthulhu' as shown in contemporary examples from *Dagon* and *Crypt of Cthulhu*, which, while informative and even critical at times (especially the latter), did nonetheless wholeheartedly succumb to self-aware parodies, pastiches, and other absurdist renditions of the entire metatext. *Crypt*, for instance, contains a column titled 'Advice to the LOVECRAFT-LORN' – a parody of Dear-Abby columns – written by Robert M. Price under the pseudonym of 'Donna Death', and a section titled 'Mail-Call of Cthulhu' where fans occasionally wrote humorously using faux-Lovecraftian language (one mailer jokes how their washer and drier were stolen by a fishy reptilian monster because their subscription lapsed).[43] Likewise, *Dagon* eventually included stories like Gaiman's and critical essays on Lovecraft, his collaborators and pasticheurs. It also included humorous content like Carl T. Ford's column 'Dr. Phibes Prescribes', written as the eponymous mad doctor from the Vincent Price film *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, where he recommends, in full dramatic gothic language, other fanzines *Dagon*'s readers ('crawling creepies') might enjoy, and Sandy Petersen's (and sometimes Greg Stafford) 'The Acolyte'

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[41] Redback Spino, 'The Library of Lovecraftian and Lovecraft-inspired Fiction', *FimFiction.net* < http://www.fimfiction.net/group/1316/the-library-of-lovecraftian-and-lovecraft-inspired-fiction#page/1> [accessed 20 July 2015]

[42] For more examples of current depictions of Cthulhu as an incongruously cute and cuddly monstrosity, see <https://www.pinterest.com/eldritchangel/cthulhu-cute-thulhu/> [accessed 20 July 2015]

[43] See also the column 'Fun Guys from Yuggoth', written by Price as well, often under the pseudonym of 'Patrice deG. Joubert', for examples of self-aware fannish interactions with the Mythos and surrounding metatext.

column, which gave advice on role-playing while also parodying Chaosium's

products: 'Other upcoming releases for *Call of Cthulhu* include MASKS OF

MYLAR-HOTEP, FRAGMENTS OF CHEER (the Christmas special), TERROR

FROM THE BARS, GONE WITH THE WENDIGO, and BLACK MASS

TRANSIT'.[44]

In short, with 'I, Cthulhu' and 'Shoggoth', Gaiman is reflecting the wide-ranging

cultural impact of Lovecraft, its longevity and manifold iterations, and most

specifically, the sense of ironic delight that permeates contemporary reactions to the

language and images of Lovecraft and the pastiches.[45] Underneath the humour and

satirical re-appropriations of the language, Gaiman's respect for the source material

is evident, even as he arguably declaws, disenchants and demystifies the original

cosmic horror. Yet, more than this, that respect (which Gaiman has commented on

in reference to other works) is transformed into a nostalgic treatment and into an

imitation of the fannish tradition of re-appropriating Lovecraft. It is an

acknowledgement of a fannish readerly metatextual revelling in the language and

forms that expresses a longing for fantastically grotesque imagery.

Gaiman's pastiches do not take place somewhere unknown to the reader, or reveal

new aspects of the Mythos previously unknown; instead the pleasure the reader

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[44] Note the fact that both Sandy Petersen and Greg Stafford worked at Chaosium. Other such sendups by them include 'Johnny Cake: the REAL roll-playing game' and 'Chainsaw Railroad Warrior Liberators in Oz' which allows 'players to create their own railroads, [equipped with] nuclear chainsaws, multiple house launchers, [and] banzai munchkins'. ('The Acolyte', *Dagon*, 16 (1987), 30).

[45] Compare further with other stories and items published in the *Dagon* fanzine and Robert M. Price's *Crypt of Cthulhu* fanzine, or publications like *Encyclopedia Cthulhiana*. See also the following sites for pictures of Neil Gaiman holding Cthulhu plush toys for further evidence of his involvement with and awareness of this aspect of the fandom: <http://neil-gaiman.tumblr.com/post/21799595051/im-using-your-works-for-a-presentation-in-my>, < http://www.innsmouthfreepress.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/neilamandacthulhu-300x225.jpg>, and < https://twitter.com/neilhimself/status/503212017251934209> [accessed 27 July 2015]

derives comes from knowing the setting and tone more than the characters in the stories themselves, from knowing it simultaneously from without and within. The metafantastic revelation achieved concerns a fantastic metatext and the subversion of the generic expectation of this metatext. Thus, where Lovecraft and the pastiches that came after him engaged in the natural if still necessarily metafictive doubling intrinsic of the genre, Gaiman's pastiches lay both the genre and the perceptions of said genre bare.

II - Pastiching the Amalgamative Lovecraftian Pastiching Tradition

The second descriptive category for Gaiman's Lovecraftian pastiches focuses on amalgamation. 'Only the End of the World Again' and 'Study in Emerald' employ many of the same mimetic stylistic and linguistic choices used in the two previously discussed stories, but focus on emphasizing that they are combinations of Lovecraft with other genres or styles. Mentions in 'Only' of the Elder Gods rising from the ocean to sweep away all the scum of the Earth, non-believers, wastrels and deadbeats, cleansing the world by 'ice and deep water' or descriptions of things scuttling in the shadows, moons rising, and octopoid shapes that writhe, are all making use of the transtextually expected Lovecraftian language. In 'Emerald', the very opening lines are explicitly announcing the conscious pastiching of both Lovecraft and Conan Doyle. 'It is the immensity, I believe. The hugeness of things below. The darkness of dreams' is alluding to the first, while 'I had been in need of lodgings. That was how I met him. I wanted someone to share the cost of rooms with me. We were introduced by a mutual acquaintance, in the chemical laboratories of St. Bart's' is effectively summarising the beginning of the latter's *A Study in*

Scarlet.[46] Throughout both stories, however, the incongruence of the elements combined is emphasized through the exaggerated use of stylistic tropes.

An example of this is the use of adjective-heavy descriptions in the first sentence of 'Only': 'Something about the quality of the light, stretched and metallic, like the color of a migraine, told me it was afternoon'.[47] A comparative word search between the complete works of Lovecraft and quintessential hard-boiled detective texts like Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, reveals that this sentence construction is almost entirely unknown to the former and all too common in the latter. In Lovecraft, as convolutedly descriptive as his language can be, the talking-in-similes trope found in noir writing is not present. There might be comparisons between equally horrifying objects as with the '[baleful] primal trees of unholy size [that…] leered above me like the pillars of some hellish Druidic temple' in 'The Lurking Fear', or 'the black gravestones [that] stuck ghoulishly through the snow like the decayed fingernails of a gigantic corpse' in 'The Festival'.[48] However, in all of these cases, the comparisons are being made between a fantastic or frightening incomprehensible object and a more tangible thing as a means of increasing the reader's imaginative visual interpretations of the scenes. In each, the comparisons follow visual or auditory logic. Conversely, in the noir fiction of Raymond Chandler, noir films, and especially in self-aware parodies and pastiches of this genre, similes and metaphors have a tendency to compare wholly incongruous things. Chandler's *The Big Sleep*,

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[46] Gaiman, 'A Study in Emerald', in *Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders*, by Neil Gaiman (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), pp. 1-26 (p. 1).
[47] Gaiman, 'Only the End of the World Again', in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 176-195 (p. 176).
[48] Other examples include 'whispers that seared […] like the hissing of vitriol' ('In the Vault'), '[the Thing] which rose above the unclean froth like the stern of a daemon galleon' ('The Call of Cthulhu'), 'windows […] with dull thick panes like the bottoms of old bottles' ('The Strange High House in the Mist'), 'tittering tones that rasped like the scratching of ground glass' ('The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath').

for instance, makes the following comparisons: '[her] eyes became narrow and almost black and as shallow as enamel on a cafeteria tray', '[the] boy stood glaring at him with sharp black eyes in a face as hard and white as cold mutton fat', and that Philip Marlowe felt 'as empty of life as a scarecrow's pocket'.[49]

Gaiman, moreover, employs a monologuing style common to private investigators in noir texts – the short cropped sentences, and the emphasis on over-description contribute further to the self-aware amalgamative pastiche being performed – to further reinforce the disparity between the two genres and the fan/reader-aware metatext of these genre, in the story.[50] The reader-response perspective, specifically the fannish readership, is thus largely what is being pastiched, and while, as with 'I, Cthulhu' and 'Shoggoth', they can be read by readers unfamiliar with either Lovecraft, hard-boiled detective mysteries, or Sherlock Holmes, they are best served by readers familiar with both the sources and the traditions being mimetically entangled, in the same way that metafiction is most effective when the narrative-baring is acknowledged by the reader. In 'Bookends of the Great Detective's Life', when talking about 'Emerald', Lynnette Porter similarly states that 'although readers to not need to be familiar with these authors' mystery or science fiction canon in order to enjoy and understand Gaiman's […] stories […] Gaiman deftly works into his alternative London the elements that will seem most comforting or common to readers'.[51] She further comments:

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[49] Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 73, 113, 174.
[50] A similar self-aware combination occurs in the short story 'Case Of The Four And Twenty Blackbirds', which combines noir fiction with nursery rhyme stories.
[51] Lynnette Porter, 'Bookends of the Great Detective's Life: Neil Gaiman's Award-Winning Pastiches', in *Sherlock Holmes for the 21st Century: Essays on New Adaptations* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), pp. 192-202 (p. 192).

Gaiman's London, for example, still has hansom cabs, back alleys, dodgy
sections of the city, and itinerant theatre troupes, as well as plot devices
familiar to Holmes fans: a mysterious murder, […] a detective working
undercover, and a trail of clues that gradually reveal the truths surrounding
the murder.[52]

Porter also emphasizes how Gaiman's Holmes stories – she is analysing Gaiman's
two Holmesian pastiches, 'Emerald' and 'The Case of Death and Honey' – are
casting the great detective into the more 'familiar modern realm of sentimentalism'
that illustrates a '21st century fondness for making Sherlock Holmes more
intentionally heroic as well as more human than he seems in the original stories'.[53]
Moreover, it reiterates how the stories 'illustrate Gaiman's knowledge of canon and
familiarity with Conan Doyle's style' while simultaneously 'succeed as modern
stories compatible with other adaptations' depictions of Sherlock Holmes created for
twenty-first century audiences.[54] In other words, as suggested in the first category,
Gaiman is more concerned with reflecting twenty-first century fan culture and
readerly reactions to Sherlock Holmes than strictly pastiching the original, though
part of the pastiching of the pastiching-perceptions includes this striving toward an
authenticity of character because that is what a twenty-first century audience would
also expect.[55]

This knowingness is then metafictively doubled through the combination, for
instance in 'Emerald', of the world of Sherlock Holmes, upon which no supernatural

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[52] Porter, p.192.
[53] Porter, p. 194.
[54] Porter, pp. 194, 199.
[55] Similar comparison might be made to the Lovecraftian characters in 'I, Cthulhu' and 'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar' where, though the characterizations of Cthulhu, Wilf, and Seth are not intended to expand the Mythos universe (any more than Holmes' is in 'Study in Emerald', or in his other Holmes pastiche, 'The Case of Death and Honey'), they still responding to a perception of how these beings might act if they were tweaked or changed slightly to more anthropomorphised qualities.

elements can intrude, with the world of the Lovecraftian Mythos, whose very

premise is the intrusion of the fantastic horror.[56] Unlike the traditional pastiche

which seeks to imitate and mirror the original text(s), and unlike amalgamating

pastiches where the narrative seeks to plausibly portray the inclusion of previously

separate characters, settings, and plots (as in Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary

Gentlemen* or even much of Farmer's Wold Newton Universe), Gaiman's 'Emerald'

is predicated on the awareness that its constituent pastiched texts do not belong

together, and that is why they are being combined.[57]

Examples of other equally metafantastical texts that employ this kind of genre

metatextual amalgamative pastiching include Loren D. Estleman's *Sherlock Holmes

vs Dracula* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Holmes* which introduce, not only gothic horror

into the Holmesian universe, but a purposefully transtextual gothic one, wherein a

recognizable impossible intrusion is perpetrated for the pleasure of the combination,

showing full awareness of the Holmesian pastiching tradition.[58] It reveals that it is

because this tradition exists that such imitations can be enacted, i.e., that because the

texts are knowingly accepted as metafictions (texts that reveal their own storyness

from their construction and necessary transtexts) they can be doubly subverted into

metafantasies.

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[56] This is also applicable to 'Only the End'.
[57] The incompatibility of these elements in such a shared universe is particularly appreciated in the twist ending of 'Study in Emerald', as the reader discovers that the consultant they have been following all along is not Holmes after all, but Moriarty. A world where Lovecraftian abominations rule England is not one where Holmes and Watson could remain 'on the side of the law', as it were, but it is one where they would need to be the criminals, and the criminals the 'heroes'. Alan Moore, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (La Jolla, CA: America's Best Comics, 2000).
[58] Loren D. Estleman, *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: Sherlock vs Dracula* (London: Titan Books, 2012); *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Holmes* (London: Titan Books, 2012).

Whether it be by exposing the amalgamative aspect of the Lovecraftian pastiching tradition through obvious disparate amalgamation of that tradition with other pastiching ones (metafictively combining traditions built on combination), or exposing the imitative aspect by using and echoing the language of that mimetic tradition (metafictively imitating a tradition of imitation), Gaiman produces stories that appear to exist on multiple levels (and thus render different readings based on the reader) precisely because it is cutting across and utilising multiple metatextual levels, offering a view of the genre through the genre. The stories, through metafiction already-present, expose the metafictionality of their components, and reveal (and revel in the revelation of) not only Gaiman's knowingness, but that of readers and writers of the genre.

Section 2: Gaiman and Fantasy Retellings

Retelling Tradition

> *Retold fairy tales offer a fascinating interplay of tradition and innovation.*
> *Authors and illustrators use the archetypes, characters, motifs, and narrative*
> *structures of the traditional tale to address today's issues in texts that are*
> *written in every mode: humorous, serious, tragic, satirical, ironic, cynical,*
> *playful, nonsensical. There are retellings to fit almost every generic category*
> *and to suit almost every literary taste and age group.*[59]

Although here Sandra Beckett is referring specifically to Little Red Riding Hood retellings, her statement is applicable to all retellings, in particular those that emerge from the genre of fantasy and its taproots, e.g. fairytales, fables and folktales. While

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[59] Sandra L. Beckett, *Recycling Red Riding Hood* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. xx.

a pastiche of fantasy, as discussed, involves the active use of another author's

characters and settings either reworked, expanded or merged with other writers'

narratives and filtered through an awareness of the genre and the original's place

within it, a fantasy retelling, though possessing similar mimetic characteristics,

focuses on the recognizable tropes and elements of fantasy's pre-texts and narrative

taproots. As such, these retellings are less likely to be transtextually connected to

one specific author given the oral tradition of the majority of these tales prior to

being collected by various scholars and folklorists.[60] Maria Tatar explains in her

book on the Grimms' fairy tales that:

> Any attempt to unearth the hidden meaning of fairy tales is bound to fail
> unless it is preceded by a rigorous, if not exhaustive, analysis of a tale type
> and its variants. That analysis enables the interpreter to distinguish essential
> features from random embellishments and to identify culturally determined
> elements that vary from one regional version of a tale to the next.[61]

Similarly, Marc Soriano, in *Les Contes de Perrault*, suggests that Perrault's

fairytales have become a text 'without a text' and 'without an author'.[62]

Nonetheless, any narrative that (inter)plays with traditional stories, especially the

most explicit ones, will inform the reader of that interplay by containing signalling

indicators to those stories by default. A story that uses the structure of Little Red-

Riding Hood does not need to acknowledge the presence of that tale, though it is its

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[60] These connections, as Chapter One addresses, are best described as 'hypertextual' given that 'the foremost characteristic of hypertextuality is that the hypertext does not (only) quote, but transforms and or imitates the hypotext: "text B… [is] unable to exist, as such, without A, from which it originates … and which it consequently evokes more or less perceptibly without necessarily speaking of it or citing it."' [Klapcsik, 'Neil Gaiman's Irony', pp. 317-334.]

[61] Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, expanded second edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 43.

[62] Marc Soriano, *Les Contes de Perrault: Culture savant et traditions populaires*, rev. ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 16. Original text says 'un texte sans texte, un texte sans auteur'; translation through Sandra Beckett's *Recycling Red Riding Hood*, p. xvii.

transtextual (mostly hypertextual) precedent. A fantasy retelling, however,
foregrounds an original; it is not simply using the elements from an original source
to springboard a fantasy story, but to actively retell an original from a modern
(genre-based) perspective. In order to retell there must be historical awareness, and
when retold through a metafictive genre, there must be awareness of the genre as
such. While not containing a direct entry on 'fantasy retellings', the *Encyclopedia of
Fantasy*'s entry on the TWICE-TOLD tale emphasises how this retelling structure is
a common one within the genre along with the dynamics of this interplay:

> [It] characterize[s] a FANTASY whose telling incorporates a clear *re*telling
> of the inherent STORY – very often of a FAIRYTALE or FOLKLORE or
> MYTH or LEGEND – *foregrounding* the existence of a previous version of
> the tale now being retold.[63]

Indeed, any story that can be branded as a retelling must necessarily be pointing to,
whether implicitly or explicitly, a past narrative which it is re-telling, even when that
narrative might in fact be several variants of one or more oral tales. That said, in his
book on the postmodern fairytale, Kevin Paul Smith, argues that:

> Oral transmission of traditional narratives is not a common activity in a
> culture that relied upon the easy dissemination of mass-produced fictions,
> and it is therefore necessary to realise that the fairytales we recognise are
> more part of a literary tradition than an oral one.[64]

In other words, although, as Tatar suggests, the variants of any fairy/folk tale must
be taken into acknowledgement whenever analysing a text that utilises intertextual
connections because they began as an oral tradition, the fact that these traditional

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[63] John Clute, 'Twice-Told', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 968.
[64] Kevin Paul Smith, *The Postmodern Fairytale* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 5.

narratives have been collected and disseminated through literature – and most especially filtered and re-filtered through fantasy as taproot texts – must also be taken into consideration. This both complicates and simplifies the analysis of fantasy retellings such as Gaiman's. On one hand it produces an ultimately suggestive, as opposed to objective, transtextual tracing of the hypotext; a story like 'The White Road', for example, which Gaiman mentions is based on a tale contained in Neil Philip's *The Penguin Book of English Folktales* collection, proves to be connected to many other variants, some of which cannot be entirely confirmed. On the other hand, the fact remains that any retelling '*foreground*[s] the existence of a previous version of the tale now being retold'. A specific version of a narrative is not necessary for the reader to know that they need to be aware of the presence of an intertext but it is necessary that they acknowledge the concept of multiple versions, i.e., acknowledge the signalling to original texts and the interdependence and retelling act itself. The fact that there are many intertextually-linked hypotexts reinforces the notion that the more metafictional a fantasy narrative can become – as experienced through the retelling of fairytales and other traditional fantasy narratives – the more metafantastical it becomes, thereby widening the possibility for interpretation, reinterpretation, deconstruction, reconstruction and overall analysis of the stories and the form through each new retelling.

However, returning to the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*'s entry on 'twice-told' tales, these retellings can include stories whose underlying narrative merely echoes or mirrors another traditional or archetypal narrative. They imply a narrative(s) that is continuously retold or that continuously reappears as a by-product of the conscious act of storytelling, particularly in fantasy. This is an important distinction to make,

one that Smith also establishes when discussing fairytale intertexts. For him, there must be a differentiation:

> [b]etween texts in which the fairytale intertext is important and contributes a significant amount to our understanding of the story, and those texts in which the fairytale is simply one intertext among many, and does not affect our reading of the text to a great extent.[65]

He further emphasises how crucial it is that 'the fictions […] utilise fairytales that are easily recognisable by their target audiences as fairytales *because it is important that the reader catches the reference*'.[66] What Gaiman and other metafantasy writers are able to achieve with fantasy retellings then encompasses the twice-told tale and surpasses it, and is closer to what the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* terms 'REVISIONIST-FANTASY re-examinations of FAIRYTALES':

> Much of what is best in contemporary GENRE FANTASY derives from a conscientious attempt to make standard genre tropes over [sic], to make the condition of fantasy new. […] Part of the essence of genre fiction is that it feeds constantly on itself (sometimes unconsciously); readers of genre fantasy want at least some of the time to be on familiar ground, to participate in the perpetuation of FANTASYLAND.[67]

In fantasy retellings based on fantasy's taproots, Fairyland, Fairytale-land, Folktale-land, and Fantasyland all converge into multi-layered metafiction. The most accurate if simplistic way of describing a fantasy retelling, incorporating both the concepts of the twice-told and the revisionist fantasy, might then be as the '[creation of]

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[65] Smith, p. 9.
[66] Italics in original. Smith, p. 6.
[67] Roz Kaveney, 'Revisionist Fantasy', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 810.

something new in fantasy out of pre-existing materials'.[68] This, especially when combined with direct commentary by the fantasy fiction on fantasy fiction and/or its constituent elements, falls under the working characteristics of metafantasy being developed here. What Gaiman and similar authors do is not only retell past narratives from a different perspective or from new points of view, but question and analyse the original stories utilising modern perceptions of the genre and of the contemporary culture that produces it. This enables them to perform a kind of literary or narrative forensic examination that lets them to tell both a new and old story simultaneously. Gaiman handles these pre-texts with twentieth and twenty-first century awareness, from his place as a writer, which necessitates a twentieth/twenty-first century awareness from the reader, but the stories themselves exhibit this apparent self-awareness. For example, the queen's journal-like monologues in 'Snow, Glass, Apples', which will be discussed ahead, exhibits this. As with his Lovecraftian pastiches, which invited a sense of self-awareness regarding Lovecraft's fiction, their fictionality, and the pastiching traditions surrounding it, these fantasy retellings are a product of a fantasy-immersed culture accustomed to retellings.

Examining Gaiman's Retellings

I - Snow White and 'Snow, Glass, Apples'

Among Gaiman's short stories, novels and comic books, 'Snow, Glass, Apples', first published in 1994 as a chapbook, is not only one of his most often discussed texts, it

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[68] Kaveney, p. 810.

is also one of the ones that best falls within the fantasy retelling category. The narrative, a retelling of the traditional 'Snow White' fairytale, focuses on the stepmother queen instead of the fair princess. This shifted perspective provides and instils empathy for the traditionally-cast evil stepmother as well as allowing Gaiman to study the character of Snow White from an outsider's point of view. It would be easy to classify this as a simple modern retelling just from the darker tone, and the heavy adult themes and imagery; however, as Zipes comments in his foreword to the play version of the story, the sexualisation of Snow White has been a part of many retellings for decades:

> He is not the only one to ask disturbing questions about the true story behind the Disney version we all know. Such gifted contemporary writers as Robert Coover, Tanith Lee, and Emma Donoghue among others have also written unsettling versions of "Snow White" that have explored the raw sexuality of a tale concerned with the flowering of a young girl and the crazed jealousy of her (step)mother.[69]

What stresses the influence of a fantasy-immersed mind (and thus subsequently the surrounding fantasy-immersed culture and readership) is the merging of vampiric lore with the 'original'. Gaiman begins by approaching the classic tale with a set of questions:

> I looked at Snow White and found myself thinking "what kind of prince says 'That corpse is really gorgeous, I want to take her back to the castle with me'?" And what kind of person has skin white as snow, lips red as blood, hair black as coal and can lie in a coffin for 2 or 3 years and then get better?[70]

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[69] Jack Zipes, 'Foreword', in *Snow Glass Apples, A play for Voices* by Neil Gaiman (Duluth, GA: Biting Dog Publications, 2011, Digital Edition).

[70] Rob Hayes, 'Neil Gaiman [an interview]', *The Alien Has Landed*, 9 (1999), pp. 3-5 (p. 5).

His response to these questions and the resulting story are a product of twentieth and twenty-first century dark Gothic fantasies. Snow White, changing not only from the image of the innocent child, but also from the image of the wanton seductress who possessed youth and beauty fleetingly – an image that has been popularised by many contemporary retellings - has been further transformed through the lens of Gothic fantasy, into a feral vampire child. The previous innocence is entirely removed; in fact, it cannot even be said to have been repositioned on the queen who though naïve in her own youth is neither innocent nor ignorant. In addition to this, Gaiman subverts the original's fairytale structure and that of general fantasy through the ending. Disregarding eucatastrophe, Snow White and her captive prince lover imprison and eventually burn the queen, effectively implying a triumph of evil over righteousness, goodness, and justice.

In *The Postmodern Fairytale*, Smith proposes 'eight identifiable ways in which the fairytale can operate as an intertext within mass-produced fictions' which he terms 'elements' in order to, he argues, 'reflect the complexity of intertextuality and to reflect that they can be found in numerous different combinations':

1. **Authorised**: Explicit reference to a fairytale in the title
2. **Writerly**: Implicit reference to a fairytale in the title
3. **Incorporation**: Explicit reference to a fairytale within the text
4. **Allusion**: Implicit reference to a fairytale within the text
5. **Re-vision**: putting a new spin on an old tale
6. **Fabulation**: crafting an original fairytale
7. **Metafictional**: discussion of fairytales

8. **Architextual/Chronotopic**: 'Fairytale' setting/environment.[71]

Of these, at least five are operating in 'Snow, Glass, Apples', and the manner in which Gaiman achieves his implicit and explicit allusions to the source material – primarily the Grimms' version - is often deceptively subtle. In her introduction on the intertextual process of fairytale retelling, Beckett cites Italian children's author, Gianni Rodari's suggestion that specific words bring up the tale of Little Red Riding Hood to mind – girl, woods, flowers, wolf, [and] grandmother.[72] Similarly, the title of Gaiman's story works suggestively on the reader; 'snow' and 'apples' suggest the story's protagonist and the method by which she is subdued in the original tale, and 'glass', either the coffin into which she is placed or the magic mirror. The references in the title are not explicit (authorised) per se, but their implication is more direct than what Smith's 'writerly' element encompasses. The specific-word and allusive-phrase references continue; the narrator's identity is quickly revealed by her assertion that she foresaw the events to be told in the 'cold glass of [her] mirror', a reference to the Queen's famous looking-glass, and the lines '[her] eyes were black as coal, black as her hair; her lips were redder than blood' cement the reference to Snow White's classic description of being 'as white as snow, and as red as blood, and her hair was as black as ebony' without having to directly mention her name at all.[73]

In addition, it informs the reader that the tale is a purposeful retelling. The operating 'cultural heritage', as Beckett calls it, is also evident; because these elements are

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[71] Smith, p. 10.
[72] Beckett, pp. xvi-xvii.
[73] Neil Gaiman, 'Snow, Glass, Apples', in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 331-346 (p. 332); Wilhelm Grimm and Jacob Grimm, 'Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs', in *The Brothers Grimm: The Complete Fairy Tales* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), pp. 261-271 (p. 261).

part of popular Western culture they are easily identified by the reader, and are indicative, not only of the present intertextuality, but the need for the reader's awareness of the discrepancy between 'original' and 'retelling'. The plot structure is referentially and purposefully different to Snow White and what is most interesting and speaks the levels of awareness at work is that the main character also reflects an awareness of this discrepancy.

The queen in 'Snow, Glass, Apples', is aware of the clichés and tropes of the original stories (fairytales, fantasy and gothic fantasy) and, in a way, of their place in cultural history. This is reflective of the author's own familiarity with these elements, channelled through a character that reacts in ways which mirrors someone familiar with the tale. For example, the queen explains how 'other people' in the realm view her: 'They call me wise, […w]ise, and a witch, or so they said', 'They [Snow White and the prince] have told the people bad things about me; a little truth to add savor to the dish, but mixed with many lies'.[74] The lines point toward the original (or the concept of an original), implying to the reader that the story they are familiar with is a lie fabricated by a vampiric Snow White. But the main character does not only show this awareness of the 'original' fairytale and its influence, but seems to be aware of the type of story she is in.

It is definitely not a fairytale, as it does not operate under the rules of one; the traditionally expected 'happy ending' for the 'good' character is not there, and neither is the moral or lesson. The character of the stepmother queen is clearly not expecting this; she is conscious of her own failings, as the story is a narration of past

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[74] Gaiman, 'Snow, Glass, Apples', pp. 331, 345.

events, and she does not paint herself as either virtuous or innocent – she knows she is not the 'good character' and that this is not a story of happy endings. In other words, though the reader is inclined to sympathise with her character, she is not asking for the reader's empathy or approval, or encouraging them to expect a positive resolution. Instead, the horror/gothic tone of the story is reflected in the narration:

> I was foolish and young – […if] it were today, I would have her heart cut out, true. But then I would have her head and arms and legs cut off. I would have them disembowel her. And then I would watch in the town square as the hangman heated the fire to white-heat with bellows, watch unblinking as he consigned each part of her to the fire. […] and I would not close my eyes until the princess was ash, and a gentle wind could scatter her like snow.[75]

The queen's speech conveys several things to the reader: that none of these things occurred, what kind of beast Snow White must be to require such treatment, and the queen's sense of resignation to the events that happened after ('I did not do this thing, and we pay for our mistakes'), all of which trigger the reader's awareness of a fantasy horror-metatext that will enable them to decode the narrative.[76] Essentially, Gaiman combines several hypotexts – taproot fairytales, fantasy, and gothic horror – into one retelling while subverting all of them. The subversion of the first two has been discussed, while the fantasy horror deconstruction emerges from the negative rendering of the ending, specifically the fact that in the story, 'evilness' is an unstoppable force, an unconquerable thing that is allowed to win and roam free in the end.

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[75] Gaiman, 'Snow, Glass, Apples', p. 334.
[76] Gaiman, 'Snow, Glass, Apples', p. 334.

Some critics have remarked that gothic fiction 'fosters its pleasure through its

handling of denouements', possessing in particular an 'open-endedness' that allows

for the narrative's 'engagement of readerly desire', meaning that while evil might

have been exterminated and/or defeated, as in the case of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*,

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the

reader's interpretative capacity allows them to read different endings according to

their particular 'desires'.[77] 'Snow, Glass, Apples' is less about leaving the ending

open to various readings concerning the interpretation of the horror, and more about

a reflection of the growing spirit of pessimism and resignation in contemporary

fantastic horror. There is no metaphorical continuation of darkness with the

surviving characters for the reader to interpret, or a questioning of the human spirit

in the face of various conflicts. Instead the reader is confronted by a direct lack of

triumph against the conflict established in the beginning of the story.[78]

At the same time, they are confronted with the realisation that what had changed is

not truly the ending, but their perceptions and expectations of the genre. In

variations of the original Grimm's tale, the wicked queen is forced to wear red-hot

iron shoes and dance until she drops dead at Snow White and the princes' wedding

feast. Alternative versions have her die of anger and spite or, as in the Disney film,

fall off a cliff. In any case, her death, the reader knows, is justified punishment.

Gaiman's retelling, by keeping her death but not the circumstances for it, reminds

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[77] Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy, *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative* (Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press, 2009), pp. 30, 31.
[78] This is a structure often employed by Gaiman where by the end of the story, not much has changed or been accomplished. Case in point, the short story 'The Price' ends with the character possessing more information about his own condition, but not being capable to do anything to improve or change it. Other stories like 'Murder Mysteries' are examples where no one 'wins' or changes for either better or worse. This growing trend in gothic and horror fiction is likely a product of pervading postmodern influences.

the reader of previous versions and their own generic expectations concerning justice, righteousness, and happy endings in fantasy. 'Snow, Glass, Apples', in conclusion, is a story embedded, fuelled, and supported by both a fairytale/fantasy metatext, and a contemporary awareness of the perceptions of that metatext – a story born of genre conventions that questions that genre.

II - Three Billy Gruff Goats and 'Troll Bridge'

Another of Gaiman's most popular fairytale retellings takes the traditional troll-under-the-bridge story and reworks it into a twentieth-century setting. It features a young boy named Jack, instead of the three trip-trapping goats from the original tale, encountering the titular troll. Meeting the troll at six years of age, Jack continuously encounters him again throughout his life, until finally, as a broken adult, he returns one last time to the old bridge and willingly allows the troll to 'eat his life'.[79] First published in *Snow White, Blood Red* in 1993, the story subverts fairytale/folktale motifs such as the main character's surrender to the 'monster' that plagued him, and serves as an effective metaphor for contemporary fears about urbanisation, capitalism and identity. In her article 'Inventions and Transformations: Imagining New Worlds in the Stories of Neil Gaiman', Mathilda Slabbert identifies some of these metaphors:

> The initial setting is evoked in lush and descriptive imagery with recurring references to light or "daylight" (Gaiman, "Troll Bridge" 60), suggestive of the young boy's innocence and ability to fantasize and dream. Environmental deterioration and the protagonist's physical and emotional decline become evident as the story proceeds and variations on "darkness" (65) become more

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[79] Gaiman, 'Troll Bridge' in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 59-70 (p. 62).

prominent. Despite the enchanting semi-pastoral descriptions at the story's onset, imagery such as the "weed-clogged ornamental pond" (60) hint at urbanization, technological development and commodification, further emphasised by the repetitive metaphoric references to trains, railway lines and stations. These images foreshadow the gradual erosion of the narrator's sense of identity and his increasing sense of dislocation and isolation in a world of displacement.[80]

This loss of identity in the face of urbanisation and displacing capitalist commodification is further emphasised by the subversion and subsequent loss of fantasy expectations. In the beginning of the story, Jack regards the semi-pastoral woods as fairyland and he continually returns to it as though in search of an illusion of fantastic expectation that cannot be fulfilled by his real world. The changes in the setting and structure are also challenging the reader's responses and expectations to the genre. Slabbert remarks that one way in which Gaiman undermines the original story's fairy tale motifs of 'heroism and bravery' is by having 'Jack emasculate himself by offering first his sister and then his adolescent girlfriend as trades so as to not be eaten by the troll'.[81] However, since Jack is replacing not one character but three, his lack of heroism is actually on a par with the original characters. In the traditional 'Three Billy Goats Gruff' tale, as collected by Asbjörnsen and Moe, the younger goats are hardly paragons of bravery or heroism any more than Gaiman's Jack is. When Jack says: 'Don't eat me, […] My big sister is going to be coming down the path soon, […] and she's far tastier than me. Eat her instead', he is echoing the little billy-goat and middle billy-goat's 'Oh, no! pray don't take me. I'm

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[80] Mathilda Slabbert, 'Inventions and Transformations: Imagining New Worlds in the Stories of Neil Gaiman', in *Fairy Tales Reimagined: Essays on New Retellings*, ed. by Susan Redington Bobby (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009), pp. 68-83 (p. 73).
[81] Slabbert, p. 76.

too little, that I am, […] wait a bit till the second [or big] billy-goat Gruff comes, he's much bigger'.[82]

The change Gaiman does make is that Jack is lying; unlike the billy-goats, there is not someone else bigger and better coming down the path later. The troll knows this and informs the boy of his failed deceit, and therein lies any 'undermining of the tale' – Jack, unlike the billy goats, cannot trick or bully the troll. Gaiman also expands the mythical or supernatural powers of the troll by making him capable of smelling the rainbows, stars, and dreams dreamt by Jack before he was born. Instead of 'undermining the fairy tale motifs' he is taking them further both fantasy-wise and non-fantasy-wise. The grimy setting clashes startlingly with the reader's fairytale experiences, but the expansion of the fantastic elements – the scarier, more powerful troll, the life-eating aspect, the manner in which the troll 'possesses' Jack's life at the end – transforms the more or less inoffensive source material into a grittier fantasy.

It is not difficult to imagine Gaiman asking the original story questions as he did with the Snow While tale: what kind of being lives all alone under a bridge, and why would he want to eat people that trip-trap above him? Is he hungry? Is he angry at the noise? And what about the two young goats? Are they not cowardly? Is the big goat defending himself or just bullying the troll? Are the goats greedy and gluttonous in their desire to go up the hill to make themselves fat? His responses as seen through the story demonstrate this underlying questioning and commentary on the pre-text, and his conclusion seems more like a subversion of the reader's

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[82] Gaiman, 'Troll Bridge', p. 62; Peter C. Asbjörnsen and Jörgen I. Moe, 'Three Billy Goats Gruff', in *Popular Tales from the Norse*, trans. by George Webbe Dasent (Edinburgh: Edminston and Douglas, 1859), pp. 295-297 (p. 295).

expectations than of the fairytale. Unlike 'Snow, Glass, Apples' the ending to 'Troll Bridge' is not traditionally tragic or horrific: Jack, in a way, finally gets a purpose in life – to be a troll – while the troll acquires a new life for himself, but it is unexpected from a traditional fantasy standpoint.[83] The reader, accustomed to clearer demarcations between the 'good' character and the 'evil' one, would expect Jack to best the troll each time, be it by actually fighting him (as the big billy-goat Gruff does) or by cleverly tricking him. As Slabbert accurately suggests though, 'the reader is initially lulled into a false expectation that the protagonist might outwit the threatening troll every time'.[84] Through the required level of intertextual awareness, Gaiman appears to encourage the reader to co-conspire with him, only to then challenge the happy-ending scenario of the original, subverting the reader's genre expectations and thereby placing them once again in a position of 'uncertain reader'.

III - Mr. Fox and 'The White Road'

First published in 1995, 'The White Road' is a retelling and a slight pastiche in verse of the traditional folktale of Mr Fox, where Gaiman, once again, makes use of inversion and subversions of the reader's expectation. Of Gaiman's retellings, it is one of the most intertextually complex, as the tale of Mr Fox has many variants (the Grimms' 'The Robber Bridegroom', Perrault's 'Bluebeard', and each of their

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[83] In this way, it seems that Gaiman is combining the troll story with the 'the grass is greener on the other side' adage. The troll and Jack exchange lives, hinting that perhaps trolls and selected humans have been doing this for a while. The exchange suits both parties, for the time being. Jack has clearly not managed to make the best of his life so his respite is to serve as troll, safe and forgotten under a bridge, waiting for another Jack to come along. The troll, on his part, is rewarded with a new, if slightly used, life. When Jack was a child and an adolescent, he had aspirations, but after his wife left him, and perhaps realising the emptiness of his life, he willingly gives himself to the troll, and thus finds solace in 'hiding', 'waiting' and 'not coming out'. In addition, the troll, in his new role of Jack (and metaphorically the billy goats) has succeeded in making himself fat, culminating by going [up] over the bridge and back to Jack's village, a mirroring of the original.
[84] Slabbert, p. 76.

original complicated sources), most of which Gaiman acknowledges and weaves into the story, hence the pastiching element.[85] In addition, making use of the name of the murdering lover, Mr Fox, Gaiman further establishes connections to Reynard the Fox, from French, Dutch and German fable (see the Ysengrimus fable), as well, vaguely, with Chinese and Japanese mythology.[86] The poem-tale features young Mister Fox visiting the home of his intended, meeting her father and friends, and the plot revolves around stories and storytelling, so that the primary story develops as the characters tell secondary stories which falsely mirror the primary one. The narrative is set up as though it is going to retell first one and later several variations of the Mr Fox fable; the young man's intended and her friend tell first a version of Halliwell-Phillipps' 'The Oxford Student' and then one that mirrors Halliwell-Phillipps' 'The Story of Mr. Fox' – the main version in Neil Philip's *The Penguin Book of English Tales*.[87] Next, the young man himself alludes to the Japanese myth

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[85] Gilles-de-Rais, the fifteenth-century serial killer of children, has been theorised as one of the inspirations behind Perrault's tale, along with Conomor the Accursed, also called Comorre the Cursed, a sixth-century ruler of Brittany. One tale of Comorre, 'The Castle of Comorre', included in the *Folk Tales of Brittany*, ed. by Elsie Masson (Philadelphia, PA: Macrae Smith Company, 1929), bears a striking similarity to the aforementioned tales, including a similar warning to the young woman to 'Beware, beware, lost creature! Comorre is on the watch to kill you!' (p. 17), which seems echo the Grimms' 'Turn back, turn back, young maiden dear,/'Tis a murderer's house you enter here' (Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, 'The Robber Bridegroom', *The Brothers Grimm: The Complete Fairy Tales* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), pp. 209-213 (p. 209, 210, 210), more than it echoes James Halliwell-Phillipps's more popular 'Be bold, be bold, but not too bold,/ Lest that your heart's blood should run cold!' ('The Story of Mr. Fox', in *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales* […] (London: John Russell Smith, 1849), pp. 47-48 (p. 47)), though it still contains a similar warning tone. These variants, the connections between them, and their possible historical origins are addressed in Ernest Alfred Vizetelly's *Bluebeard: An Account of Comorre the Cursed and Gilles de Rais, with Summaries of Various Tales* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1902), in Iona and Peter Opie's *The Classic Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), as well as in Neil Philip's *The Penguin Book of English Folktales* (London: Penguin Group, 1992) pp. 158-162. This last one also offers additional examples and analyses than the previous two critical texts' links, including links to Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Mary Ellen Lamb and Karen Bamford's *Oral Traditions and Gender in Early Modern Literary Texts* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2008) also mentions this connection (citing Philips) as well as one to Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (Lamb and Bamford, p. 76). Gaiman would no doubt be familiar with many of these references given that Philip cites the majority in the *Penguin Book of English Folktales*.

[86] In the Introduction to *Smoke and Mirrors*, Gaiman explains that the 'versions in this retelling of the story were inspired by variants on the tale [he] found in *The Penguin Book of English Folktales*.

[87] Halliwell-Phillipps' 'The Oxford Student' contains the lines 'The boughs did bend; myheart did ache/To see what hole the fox did make' (in *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales* […], pp. 49-50 (p. 49), which Gaiman echoes in 'The White Road' when the girl tells that the protagonist in her story

of the kitsune where foxes disguised as women are always discovered by their tails.

Together, these tales seem to be setting up an expected ending where the stories told

will turn out to be completely true.

As in 'Troll Bridge', Gaiman invites the reader to examine their perceptions of these

folktales, inverting their expectations by playing with (and even preying upon) their

transtextual knowledge. He drops enough direct and indirect hints, ticking at least

five of Kevin Paul Smith's 'eight identifiable ways in which the fairytale can

operate as an intertext within mass-produced fictions', for the reader to easily

become self-assured of the kind of tale they are interacting with. Once again, as with

'Troll Bridge', Gaiman, through a metafantasy dynamic, makes the readers co-

conspirators in the fantasy/fairytale storytelling process, only to ultimately subvert

all of the variants and connections established. The young Mr Fox is denounced at

the end as being 'Reynard', 'Tod', 'Bluebeard' and 'Gilles-de-Rais', as the reader

would expect, and yet this expectation is subverted at the very end when it is

revealed that it is the story told by Mr Fox' lover that is the lie.[88]

IV - Nicholas Was…

A short mention of 'Nicholas Was…' should be made, as this 100 word (102 title

included) story bears many of the same characteristics as the other retellings here

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sings 'The bough did bend/The bough did break/I saw the hole/The fox did make'. (Gaiman, 'The White Road', in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 111-122 (p. 113).

[88] It is not completely clear whether Mr Fox is tricked by one fox or a family of foxes. The girl's family are described as 'all honest farmers, fox-hunting men', yet when she denounces Mr Fox in a scene reminiscent of the previously mentioned tales ('Behold, Mister Fox! Her Hand! Her poor pale hand!'), the narrative describes '[her] father, brothers, friends, they stare at [Mister Fox] hungrily' before attacking the young man. Only the 'pale girl', his intended's friend, is said to have a 'tail between her legs', but the fact that the other members of the family should have noticed that the 'hand' was actually a fox's paw implies they were all foxes in disguise (pp. 121, 122).

discussed.[89] It offers a twisted snapshot of the 'true', tortured life of Father

Christmas, and while neither this name, 'Santa Claus' or even 'Saint Nicholas' is

used, the reader should have no trouble in identifying the allusion and

acknowledging the subversion taking place. Problems arise from the 'retelling'

aspect, namely the question of whether or not it is a retelling, and if so of what.

Unlike Gaiman's previous retellings, the sources for this mythic figure are far more

extensive and complex, being an amalgamation of real, mythical, and fictitious

persons from several countries, extending as far back as the fourth century. On the

other hand, a tale with such mythical underpinnings suggests it should be regarded

as a taproot, and any story offering a new twist on a fantasy taproot is a retelling.

This act of retelling must necessarily point toward an original because retelling

(especially in the way Gaiman does) foregrounds the concept of an original. It is, at

the same time, being subversive, though exactly of what is difficult to determine in

such a short tale.

In metafiction and by extension metafantasy, it is the act of pointing which the

reader identifies more than the specific thing to which it is pointing (Chris Dowd

explains it as a focus on function rather than content).[90] However, while this story

also contains some elements could be argued to be a product of an awareness of

contemporary fantasy influences, such as the transformation of the cheerful elves

into 'dwarfish natives of the Arctic caverns', and the possible addition of other

mythic figures like Prometheus, Loki, Sisyphus and Judas into the world of Father

Christmas thus making into a myth-mixing metafantasy (although these could

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[89] Gaiman, 'Nicholas Was…' in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman, p. 50. Originally published in *Drabble II-Double Century* (Essex: Beccon, 1990), p. 33.

[90] See Chris Dowd's essay 'An Autopsy of Storytelling: Metafiction and Neil Gaiman', in *The Neil Gaiman Reader*, ed. by Darrell Schweitzer, pp. 103-114.

merely be a metaphorical comparison), it can also be argued that these elements and stances are also naturally in modern fantasy retellings of the taproots. In other words, if these elements and characteristics, subtle as they might be, come from and point toward the existence of fantasy as genre and the reader needs them in order to appreciate the subversion taking place, then 'Nicholas Was…' is also a fantasy retelling and therefore metafantastic. On the other hand, if they do not exhibit an awareness of fantasy as genre, and it cannot be determined how an awareness of genre on the part of the reader enables them to decode the story, then it is merely a taproot retelling, possessing only fantasy's inherent metafictiveness.

4.3 On Non-Fantasy Fantasy Retellings and Conclusions

While with fantasy, the reader's expectations, intertextual awareness of the fantastic and their familiarity with fantasy's taproots are the tools with which the narrative is sustained, in a metafantasy like 'The White Road', the reader's familiarity with fantasy and the pretexts are used both to sustain the narrative as well as to challenge the reader. Their awareness of the 'game' is crucial to the subversion of their hypertextually-driven expectations. Nonetheless, it is important to note that not all stories that contain references to fairytales (to other pre-texts or to fantasy) are 'retellings', even when they are written from a genre-aware perspective. Gaiman's 'Locks' poem is an example of this.[91] While it provides a commentary on the fairytale from a contemporary fantasy standpoint, it does not retell the story of Goldilocks in a narrative sense. The story, in poem form like 'The White Road', centres on a father's thoughts on the Goldilocks tale as his child requests the story to

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[91] Gaiman, 'Locks', in *Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders*, pp. 169-171. Originally published in *Silver Birch, Blood Moon* (New York: Avon Books, 1999), pp. 313-318.

be told again and again. It is not a retelling, but a direct analysis of the original, full of fantasy indicators but lacking the fantasy elements themselves. This type of metafantasy dynamic will be explored in Chapter Four.

The contemporary fairytale, like Kevin Paul Smith explains, has experienced such intertextual evolution and reached such a level of conscious awareness of its own form (and the act of reading it), that any and all recombination and direct acknowledgement of it (especially when channelled through other metafictive forms like modern fantasy and/or horror) can only succeed in rendering the narrative ever more metafictional (and when channelled in this way, metafantastical). In short, the modern fairytale retelling can never be anything else than a highly intertextual metafictive form. Furthermore, fairytale retellings, such as Gaiman's, cannot be anything other than a 'fantasy retelling'. That is not to say that all fairytale retellings are fantasy retellings, which would make them all metafantasy, but that any fairytale retelling whose 'perspective' standpoint is genre-aware and therefore necessitates a Fantasy-reader's awareness to decode it, is a 'fantasy retelling', i.e. a retelling that uses fantasy and that is, by extension, metafantastic. They are this because they necessarily reveal and point toward a hypertext – always explicitly showing the intertextual connections. By virtue of being a 'told-again' story, the narrative must indicate (unintentionally or even through the most subtle of retellings) that there is an original that is being retold. In addition, the lens through which the story is being retold is stationed at the contemporary-fantasy end of the spectrum – meaning that this metafictive genre is providing an intertextual web of connections to other already metafictive narratives. If, for example, feminist retellings of fairytales reveal a commentary (deconstructive analysis) on fairytales, society and feminism (as

Slabbert argues), then retellings from a fantasy standpoint (and by extension 'fantastic') equally deconstruct and offer analysis (metafictionally-speaking) of the genres involved as well as of the readership of those genres – exploring, via fiction, the literary and cultural impact of the constituent elements in themselves.

Section 3: Gaiman and Fantasy Awareness

Genre-Aware Characters

As discussed in this chapter's previous sections and in Chapter Two, metafantasy narratives can be constructed through a varied number of methods, all of which ultimately reveal the necessary acknowledgement or apparent awareness of the genre of fantasy itself on the part of the reader. Arguably, the most obvious metafictive method of demonstrating an awareness of modern fantasy while constructing fantasy occurs when the characters or the narrative voice openly exhibit degrees of genre awareness by portraying acknowledgement, instinctive knowledge and/or ironic indifference toward the common tropes, elements and archetypes presented in the narrative. Pastiches, parodies and retellings rely on the reader's knowingness of the metafiction being performed, that is, on their capability of identifying the intertextual/hypertextual connections being established between the metafantasy narrative and other fantasy/fantastic narratives, and/or of the stylistic and thematic allusions and references to, and subversions of, stereotypical or traditional genre conventions, tropes, elements and clichés. Fantasy-aware characters or voices in the narrative, however, directly confront these stereotypes, not merely by being openly stylised as a stereotype, but by blatantly pointing toward

them, instead of wholly relying on the reader to identify these elements or on the metafictiveness of intertextual referencing. In popular parlance, these characters (and subsequently their readers) are often referred to as 'genre savvy', and can be defined as characters that 'subvert conventional tropes and make [stereotypical and/or unstereotypical] statements to demonstrate their resistance to narrative forms'.[92]

In the metafictive works of Borges such as 'The Circular Ruins', 'Borges and I', and 'The Other', or in Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* or *Invisible Cities*, one of the elements that stands out the most is the characters' awareness of fiction as a concept and/or of their own fictionality. In chapter one, the metafictiveness of Borges' 'The Circular Ruins' is discussed in terms of its revelling in the imaginative and inventive (or creative) process of making fiction. Borges' focus on dreaming and creating reveals both the reality and unreality of imagination/fiction, making the reader ponder and consider these tenuous borders as well. Nevertheless, it is the protagonist's own acceptance and acknowledgement of these fragile relationships, and his eventual self-realisation that he is himself a dream, that gives the narrative a very obvious level of metafictionality.

At that point, the reader is confronted by and cannot escape from the acknowledgement that everyone (fiction, protagonist and themselves) is aware of the same meta-notions – of the language of fiction being spoken. In 'Borges and I', and 'The Other' an analogue of Borges converses with- or talks about other correspondent versions of himself, respectively. In each story, at least one of these

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[92] Laura J. Shepherd, *Gender, Violence and Popular Culture: Telling Stories* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 9.

iterations is aware of either their own fictionality, the fictionality of the others, or the mistake of attributing 'reality' to either vision. In both, by virtue of at least one of the characters considering the possibility of their fictionality, the overall fictiveness – and thus metafictionality – of the story is made blatantly clear to the reader.

Similarly, in *If on a winter's night a traveller*, in addition to the narrative's acknowledgment of the existence of the reader's level ('You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, […]. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought'), which can be taken as a direct acknowledgment on the part of the narrator about his own fictionality, and also taking into consideration the multiple narratives that begin and are interrupted as a new one begins, Calvino fully exposes the operating metafiction, as Borges often does with his stories, by having the 'protagonist' be the reader, as they narrate (to the reader) their attempts to find the novel they are reading, and within which they are 'found'.[93]

In *Metafiction*, Waugh explores what authorial presence and commentary in a narrative – i.e. what the 'implied' author voicing their opinions or thoughts in discordance with the narrative – does to a metafictional text. For Waugh, this 'ironic flaunting of the Teller', which shows the fictionality of the fiction, breaks down the balance between 'the construction of realistic illusion and its deconstruction', so that 'the metafictional tension of technique and counter-technique is dissolved, and metafictional elements are superseded by those of surrealism, the grotesque, randomness, cut-ups and fold-ins'.[94] Waugh classes these as 'radical' metafictions,

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[93] Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveller* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 3.
[94] Waugh, *Metafiction*, pp. 130, 131. Citing Genette to explain how these types of texts reveal that 'montrer' ('show' or 'showing') 'ce ne peut être qu'une façon de raconter' (can only be a way of telling), she further elaborates her point explaining that 'instead of integrating the "fictional" with the

and implies that they are found at the extreme end of her (arbitrary) metafiction scale.[95]

However, Waugh argues that 'by breaking the conventions that separate authors from implied authors from narrators from implied readers from readers, the novel reminds us […] that "authors" do not simply "invent" novels' but are 'themselves "invented" by readers who are "authors"'.[96] This means that by breaking the conventions of what characters in certain circumstances or settings know, how they behave, react and interact with their surroundings (be it the fictional or paratextual), readers are likewise reminded that they are characters, that characters are readers, and that there is such a thing as genre to which both the reader and the characters have access, and from which they can extract knowledge. In other words, if the intrusion of the 'real' author upon the narrative breaks the fragile illusion of fiction, then characters within the fiction reflecting a knowledge of the type of story they are in, outright knowing or expressing some awareness of their own fictionality, or making decisions that reflect awareness of story, should be regarded as even more radical in its underlying commentary upon the 'construction of the story'.

This means that genre fiction has the capacity for becoming increasingly more metafictional than non-genre fiction in that, through the generation of recognisable elements, characters can be created who react in what would be perceived – if viewed from non-genre perspectives – as unusual or paradoxical. Waugh argues that

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"real" as in traditional omniscient narrative, [the Real Author] splits them apart by commenting not on the *content* of the story but on the act of narration itself, on the *construction* of the story' (translation mine).

[95] Waugh, pp. 130-136.

[96] Waugh, p. 134.

radical metafictions, because they function through 'forms of radical

decontextualization':

> [D]eny the reader access to a centre of orientation such as a narrator or point
> of view, or a stable tension between 'fiction', 'dream', 'reality', 'vision',
> 'hallucination', 'truth', 'lies', etc.[97]

Applying these arguments to fantasy – an already intrinsically metafictive genre that

subverts stable tensions and connections – reveals the metafantasy that operates in

certain narratives. As fantasy becomes an identifiable style and genre, it becomes

stereotyped by virtue of certain elements, forms and formats inevitably becoming

common. Genre-aware (fantasy-aware) characters destabilize this 'stable tension'

once again, as they, whether intentionally or otherwise, serve to provide

commentary upon the construction of fantasy narratives themselves. In Gaiman's

Sandman, for example, the nature of stories and storytelling is contemplated

repeatedly throughout, from Lucien's library in the Dreaming to Morpheus'

discussions with William Shakespeare, to Dream's role as the 'Shaper of Story'. In

The Tempest (issue 75), Morpheus tells Shakespeare that they must talk about tales

and plays, to which Shakespeare replies 'Life is no play… there is no shape to

events, no point at which we turn to the audience for their praise, no time at which

we step behind the stage'.[98] Dream explains then that that is precisely where they are

– backstage, in the land of dreams, - and that though he is the prince of stories, he

has no story of his own. These reflections, which come at the end of the series that

follows the story of Dream, are very knowing nods to the reader. That Dream's

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[97] Waugh, p. 136.

[98] Gaiman, *The Tempest*, p. 30. See also Bryan Talbot's *Alice in Sunderland*, a highly metafictive half-narrative half-monograph comic book where the main character frequently goes back stage and bows to the reader, or Gaiman's *American Gods* when Shadow and Wednesday step into the backstage of the world.

story, in addition to being written in Destiny's book and alluded to in the series, is an archetypal tale complete with a magical rebirth that Morpheus half-consciously follows because he knows that's how the story must end, betrays this awareness.[99]

These metafantasies contain characters for whom the fantastic (as genre and story) might be common place, or at least familiar enough to account for their nonchalant reactions to the wondrous, uncanny and unusual. As will be examined ahead, these kinds of characterisations, are as numerous and varied as the different ways metafantasy is produced. A character may merely exhibit a general awareness of the genre – both fantasy and the overall fantastic – which can be translated into an awareness of the type of narrative they are in (as will be seen in the case of Mrs. Whitaker in Gaiman's 'Chivalry'). In other narratives, this metafantastical awareness develops gradually, and even reluctantly, throughout the story (as with Richard Mayhew in *Neverwhere*). In yet others, characters make use of their 'genre-savviness' to their own benefit, especially if there are other characters who do not share this awareness (Crowley, and Aziraphale to a lesser degree, behave thus in *Good Omens*, as well as several gods in *American Gods*). Such reactions are then transferred to the reader, who, because of their own familiarity or lack thereof, will either respond with baffled confusion or with knowing recognition. Here, Waugh's argument of the reader being denied access through decontextualisation – which

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[99] Additional examples, from the last issue of *The Kindly Ones* alone, include Lucifer's thoughts on how he is not the author but a character in the story of the universe, the Furies' final thoughts on the events that took place calling it 'the same old story', and Thessaly's final panel where she is reading a book titled *When Real Things Happen to Imaginary People*. See also Cain's words in *The Wake* (The Sandman Series, 70 (New York: Vertigo, 1995), pp. 10-12) about how he and Abel must always exist in opposition to each other because they are mythologically contracted to do so; the direct fourth-wall-breaking inclusion of the reader as one of the attendants of the wake (Gaiman, *The Wake*, The Sandman Series, 71 (New York: Vertigo, 1995), p. 1); or when Destiny reads from his book 'It was late afternoon when they reached the island' and on the first panel on the following page the narration box reads the same (Gaiman, *Brief Lives*, The Sandman Series, 47 (New York: Vertigo, 1994), pp. 14-15).

intriguingly echoes Mendlesohn's argument regarding the characteristics of her

liminal fantasy category – is thus both applicable and inaccurate, depending on the

reader's own familiarity with the genre.

Addressing Mendlesohn's 'Liminal Fantasy'

In 'The Liminal Fantasy' chapter of *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn discusses the

aware protagonist and their relationship with the reader as one of her examples of

liminal fantasy.[100] Mendlesohn stresses that there exists an apparent contradiction in

this relationship that succeeds in estranging the reader from the narrative. She

classifies this type of fantasy as 'liminal' not because it is necessarily placed at the

thresholds of the genre, but because 'it [has] no obvious boundaries', although in

articles published prior to the book she had also termed it 'estranged fantasy'.[101]

Mendlesohn posits that it is 'that form of fantasy which estranges the reader from

the fantastic as seen and described by the protagonist', and particularly cites Joan

Aiken's 'Yes, But Today is Tuesday' (1944) as an example of this estrangement. In

the story, the Armitage family experiences a series of bizarre and fantastic events

but react with an unexpected familiarity to what is to them 'everyday magic'.[102]

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[100] *Rhetorics of Fantasy* is a taxonomic work that aims to classify fantasy tests according to the place from which the fantastic emerges. It is divided into five categories: 'portal/quest fantasies', in which the protagonist moves from a non-fantastic place to one with the fantastic through a portal or by engaging in a quest that takes them from an initially non-fantastic or low-fantastic place to a fantastic one; 'immersive fantasies' that take place in a fully fantastic landscape; 'intrusion fantasies' wherein the fantastic intrudes upon the non-fantastic world of the protagonist; 'liminal fantasies' which are discussed throughout this thesis; and 'the irregulars', which includes texts that do not fit into the previous categories. There have been critical disagreements concerning this taxonomic model (see, for instance, Adam Roberts' review 'Faulty Cartography. Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*', *Extrapolation*, 49 (2008), 506-512).

[101] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), pp. 182, 183. Mendlesohn concedes that it is the category 'most susceptible to […] Attebery's argument for the fuzzy set'.

[102] Mendlesohn, p. 182; Joan Aiken, 'Yes, But Today is Tuesday', in *The Serial Garden* (Dexter, MI: Consortium, 2008), pp. i, 1-9.

The family, quite at ease with magical things taking place on Mondays, are perplexed and inconvenienced by the sudden appearance of a unicorn in their back garden on Tuesday morning. The story estranges the reader because the story is, under Mendlesohn's categories, an 'intrusion fantasy' (whereby the fantastic 'disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled'), where characters do not react as would be commonly expected in an intrusion fantasy.[103] However, as with Waugh's decontextualisation via the 'real' author's unnatural (or unexpected) intrusion upon the text, it is difficult to entirely support this estrangement perspective given what Mendlesohn also mentions later in the same chapter: 'Crucial to the construction of liminal fantasy is that it is a two-way process. It depends on *knowingness*, or what Barthes described as a shared code'.[104]

Mendlesohn expands further saying that 'although the dialectic between reader and author is always central to the process of interpretation in the liminal fantasy, it is central to the construction of the fantastic'.[105] Indeed, as previously discussed, both fantasy and metafantasy, by virtue of being metafictive forms, always rely on the cooperative interpretative process of author and reader. This is not limited to one form of fantasy but applicable to all. In metafantasy, in fact, it is even more necessary given that both author and reader must be co-participants in the 'knowingness' of certain elements – variant as they may be from fiction to fiction – in order for the metafantasy to not collapse. This means that the reader cannot be 'estranged', but is instead a co-conspirator (or confabulator) with (implied) authorial/narrative voice(s). They share in the knowingness with be it the narrator, or

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[103] Mendlesohn, pp. 115, 182.
[104] Mendlesohn, p. 183.
[105] Mendlesohn, p. 183.

a particular character, allowing for a new set of responses and reactions to the fantasy landscape.[106]

Analysing 'Yes, But Today is Tuesday', Mendlesohn argues that there is dissonance between the family's reaction and the reader's response: 'we do not see as fantastic what the family see as fantastic' and there is doubt, on the reader's part:

> [B]ecause the family seem to question whether anything truly fantastic has happened at all. We could even see this as an immersive fantasy because the protagonists take it all for granted. Except that they do not; instead they conceive the events as both fantastical in their specificity but normal in their occurrence.[107]

An infrequent fantasy reader might read such a story and indeed face such dissonance and doubt because they are not expecting the family to react in such a way. Frequent fantasy readers, however, upon arrival at a story where a unicorn suddenly appears in a family's back garden will more likely react with a lack of surprise and even cynically reply 'of course' because this is precisely the kind of fantastic occurrence that might be expected in a fantasy story.[108] The fact that the family respond in a similar way to the reader's familiarity instead of making the reader adopt a persona of ignorance dissipates the natural dissonance between reader/protagonist and creates a partnership between them.[109]

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[106] Consider the previously cited 'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar', where the reader has more knowledge in common with the Batrachian demons than the human protagonists.

[107] Mendlesohn. p. 192.

[108] Note the necessary stress on the recognition and expectation of receiving a fantasy story. That is not to say that the reader is expecting fantasy in a fantasy story, but that the occurrence of fantasy in a fantasy story is not a cause for surprise on their part.

[109] Several of Gaiman's picture books for children play with this awareness of story, specifically fairytale/fantasy expectations, like *Wolves in the Walls* (2003) or *Fortunately, the Milk* (2013).

Mendlesohn cites Brian McHale's 'rhetoric of contrastive banality' in order to reconcile the dissonance between the naturalisation of the fantastic and the reader's expectation. In *Postmodernist Fiction*, McHale devotes a chapter to the postmodern fantastic and he particularly addresses the lack of Todorovian hesitation in 'fantastic' texts where the characters' reactions to the fantastic are subdued or inverted. McHale argues that this lack does not need to result in a lack of amazement in the reader, but on the contrary:

> […] the characters' failure to be amazed by paranormal happenings serves to heighten our amazement. The rhetoric of contrastive banality, we might call this. Far from smothering or neutralizing the fantastic effect, as Todorov apparently believed it would, this 'banalization' of the fantastic actually sharpens and intensifies the confrontation between the normal and paranormal.[110]

McHale further stresses the point that even if the 'resistance of normality against the paranormal' is not expressed by the characters, it is still experienced by the reader, which will then be 'heightened, foregrounded, by the contrastive banality of the characters' bland non-reaction'.[111] This, as with Mendlesohn's conclusions regarding liminal fantasy, however, presupposes a specific type of reader – one that requires a 'resistance of normality against the paranormal', and does not account for readers who, through continued incursions into fantasy narratives, might also find the fantastic normal and expected. While certainly, 'our amazement is reinforced by the naturalization of the fantastic', it is not because it is in 'dissonance' with the reader's response to the fantastic but because it is in fact synchronous with the protagonist's – because it is in a meta-metafictive dialogue with the fantasy-savvy

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[110] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 76-77.
[111] McHale, p. 77.

reader.[112] The reader, instead of being forced to divorce themselves from their

knowledge and familiarity with fantasy in order to experience each fantasy world

through the eyes of the protagonist, is allowed to interact with a character whose

responses mimic, mirror and/or approximate their own 'naturalization of the

fantastic', or who questions and subverts those responses by being aware of them.

Reader and protagonist thus share a kinship in responding to that which should

surprise but is instead taken for granted. It is through this new, refreshing

perspective into the fantasy world that the reader's sense of wonder is renewed.

Mendlesohn emphasises that unlike in an immersive fantasy where it is natural for

the landscape to be familiar to the protagonist but not to the reader, in the liminal

fantasy 'the fantastic within the text should be as alien to the protagonist as it is to

us. The moment of doubt is triggered by our sense that there should be some

reaction to the fantastic'.[113] The question is whether or not the text should be alien to

the reader as well, and which reaction to the fantastic is the reader expecting. By the

very element of knowingness, which Mendlesohn identifies, and by the ironic

construction of these narratives (in many cases) – as seen in particular in pastiches,

parody, and even retellings – the surprise, if any occurs, is not born out of a

contradiction between protagonist and reader at all. Instead, it is the realisation that

the fantastic landscape is alien to neither the protagonist nor the reader *on the same

level*; that is, that as 'knowers' of the tropes of fantasy (to varying degrees), both

protagonist and reader are on the same page.[114] The protagonist's expectancy is the

reader's expectancy, which accounts for the necessary element of wonder required;

the wonder is experienced at the meta level (although the fantasy can still be

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[112] Mendlesohn, p. 182.
[113] Mendlesohn, p. 191.
[114] Or in some cases, the narrative voice; see Catherynne M. Valente's *Fairyland* series.

wondrous even when expecting it to be so). Whether the narrative eventually actually contains these or not, the reader, author and character(s) have already reached a consensus, a common level of understanding as consumers and creators of fantasy.

One of the points Mendlesohn raises is that liminal fantasies 'create possible readings', as opposed to quest fantasies which 'shut down such readings'. Because liminal fantasies, Mendlesohn posits, following Fredric Jameson's argument on genres, are built on social contracts 'between a writer and a specific reader', they rely on the reader and their particular reading. Yet, if the liminal fantasy is supposed to estrange the reader and contradict their sense of fantastic-reaction expectations on the part of the protagonist producing a dissonance between the two, then a dependency on a social contract between writer and reader seems incompatible, and if they create possible readings, some of these readings must involve readers who possess that sense of knowingness. Reader response theory confirms this idea of multiple possible readings, and in addition stresses that it is a quality inherent in all fiction. Nevertheless, considering Mendlesohn's study is largely ideological, her perceptions and observations are useful here.[115] As she notes, there is a noticeable strangeness from this kind of fantasy wherein characters can react with unexpected ease in the face of the fantastic and readers are relied upon to react and/or acknowledge these discrepancies. In fact, the very notion of 'possible readings', filtered through reader response theory, sheds light on what is likely the most blatant metafantasy form.

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[115] Though purporting to be structuralist in form and intent, Mendlesohn concedes from the beginning of her work that it is also grounded on observations, and influenced ideological possibilities and positions. (p. xvi.)

As Louise Rosenblatt argues in *Literature as Exploration*, 'there is no such thing as a generic reader' but instead, 'millions of individual readers of […] potential millions of individual literary works', while at the same time a 'live circuit' between readers and texts is maintained.[116] By '[drawing] on past experiences of life and language to elicit meaning from the printed words' in order to 'attain new understanding', combined with 'significant images that will stimulate [them …] to participate in the literary work' chosen by the writer, the 'shared code' between them is transmitted.[117] If a text is metafictional, so will the discourse of that shared code be, and so must it be in a metafantastical text. That said, dissonances in the reader's application of experience to decode the code and the writer's intentions is what produces multiple readings.

At the same time, because, as reader response critics argue, there are possible readers that can be identified – mock-readers, narratees, implied-readers, superreaders, – (none of which necessarily equal the 'real' reader) and because metafantasy is a metafictive form that relies upon a reader's awareness of those forms and their construction, it is not unreasonable to target the concept of the 'ideal reader' as the one most likely to resemble the reader the text needs/suggests. By analysing the behaviours and characteristics of self-aware and/or genre-aware protagonists in metafantasies – such as from the numerous examples found throughout Gaiman's works – patterns for 'required knowledge' or 'required characteristics' can also be determined for the implied ideal reader. That is not to say that the text is what determines the meaning that is to be derived, but that it signals to the type of reader needed to derive the meaning from it.

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[116] Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1983), p. 25.
[117] Rosenblatt, pp. 26, 34, 49.

Metafantasy Through Fantasy-Aware Protagonists

Characters in fantasy texts, either by entering or being overtaken by the fantastic, must traditionally express surprise at it (unless they are from a naturally fantastic, i.e. immersive, world), as a person in the 'real world' would likely do – a reaction that betrays and/or reveals the impossible nature of the fantasy, and thereby renders it wondrous and marvellous. What renders characters as 'self-aware' in metafantasy, and hence one difference between it and fantasy, is that these protagonist(s)' reactions mirror the genre-aware reader's reactions, despite whatever setting they are in. They have either knowledge, instinctive knowledge, or experience of how story (i.e., fantasy stories) unfolds and progresses.[118]

The first reaction mentioned above actually mirrors the reader's response to fantasy. It is the doublethink awareness conundrum of the reader – aware that it is impossible fantasy in order to experience wonder (through hesitation), and aware that it is real in order to interact with the narrative at face value (as opposed to in purely allegorical and metaphorical ways). Fantasy's metafictionality, while ever-present, is usually subtle and unobtrusive in terms of its relation to the reader. While it demands the acceptance and maintenance of two contradictory propositions, a 'knowingness' about Story and its construction, and a general familiarity with fantasy's taproots, it nonetheless allows them to approach it without consciously thinking about the metafictive levels being broken. In essence, while fantasy narratives inherently reveal their own fictionality, they do not necessarily reveal the reader's own participation, place and interaction with them, even though it blatantly

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[118] 'Story' as in John Clute's transparent 'self-coherent narrative'. (Clute, 'Story', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, pp. 338; 899-900).

depends on it. On the contrary, metafantasy, like some of the more insistent metafictions, holds up a mirror to the reader themselves and their relationship to the genre. This will be discussed further in the final chapter analysing Fantasy's connection to metafantasy, but suffice it to emphasise the importance of the reader's prior experience with the genre. Similar experience, or the appearance of experience, on the part of a character is what makes the fantasy-aware protagonist stand out.

The metafantasy self-aware character tends to exhibit recognition and lack of surprise, elements that, as seen in the sections on pastiche and retellings, are also present in the reader. Because metafantasy relies on the knowledgeable reader of fantasy – the reader who is familiar with the tropes, archetypes and stereotypes of the form, the protagonists of such metafantasies can also adopt similar stances. This is not to say that all metafantasy must necessarily contain fantasy-aware characters, any more than all metafantasies must deal with recombinations of other fantasies, retellings of fantasy's taproots, or parodies, but that as fantasy becomes more metafictional – that is, as it uses itself more and more as intertext – it embraces more obvious forms of self-referentiality, one of these being the self-aware protagonist.

Genre-Aware Characters in Gaiman's Fiction

Just as there are 'millions' of possible readers, or at least numerous kinds of readers within possible groups of intertextually linked/similar 'ideal' readers, there are different ways in which genre-aware characters are constructed. These range from the fiction-aware protagonist (the character who knows he is in a fictional narrative) to those characters who, through a passing familiarity with the genre of fantasy, are

able to utilise certain information advantageously (or sometimes merely ironically) as they interact with the fantastic. Gaiman's works are filled with examples that demonstrate the range of aware characters, through which various metafantasy readers can also be identified, particularly in the form of Mrs. Whitaker from the short story 'Chivalry'; Aziraphale and Crowley in *Good Omens*; the Marquis de Carabas in *Neverwhere* (and eventually the protagonist, Richard Mayhew); several of the gods, particularly Wednesday, Mr. Nancy and Mr. Ibis and to some extent Shadow in *American Gods*; as well as occasionally other minor characters in these works. Though Gaiman infrequently breaks the metaphorical 'fourth wall' between the fiction and the real world, by having characters who exhibit behaviours analogous to a genre-aware reader, his narratives arguably do perform a similar function to that of breaking the fourth wall – i.e. revealing the fictionality of the fiction. More than this, by revealing this dynamic, the character establishes an affinity to the reader and engages their participation in the creative process.

First published in 1992 in *Grails: Quests, Visitations and Other Occurrences*, 'Chivalry' centres on a little old lady, named Mrs. Whitaker, who finds the Holy Grail in an Oxfam shop. She is subsequently visited by Sir Galaad, a Knight of the Round Table on a quest to retrieve the Grail. Mrs. Whitaker is an example of a main protagonist exhibiting an awareness of the fantastic via indifference and lack of surprise, very similar to the Armitage family in 'Yes, But Today is Tuesday'. The story begins with a sentence that immediately signals to the uncharacteristic treatment of the fantastic that is to follow: 'Mrs. Whitaker found the Holy Grail; it was under a fur coat'.[119] The incongruous combination of the ordinary – Mrs.

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[119] Neil Gaiman, 'Chivalry' in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 35-49 (p. 35).

Whitaker and fur coats – with the fantastic – the Grail – is noticeable not because they are being brought together, but because they are being brought together as though it is a curious but nonetheless commonplace occurrence. The narrative is not implying that it is wondrous or serendipitous that the Grail has been discovered (as might be expected in such a story). Instead, it is merely stating facts, and this matter-of-factly approach is reinforced by the protagonist's behaviour:

> Mrs. Whitaker picked up the dusty silver goblet and appraised it through her think spectacles.
> "This is nice," she called to Marie.
> […]
> "What is it?"
> "It's the Holy Grail," said Mrs. Whitaker.[120]

Mrs. Whitaker purchases the Grail, takes it home to put on the mantelpiece, and when Galaad the Knight shows up at her door on his quest for the holy cup, she behaves as though she was expecting just that sort of thing ('"Hello," [Galaad] said. "Hello," said Mrs. Whitaker. "I'm on a quest," he said. "That's nice," said Mrs. Whitaker, noncommittally.').[121] It is not that she makes a habit of personally interacting with the actual fantastic (though the narrative neither implies nor denies this), but that it is a kind of a side effect from being familiar with narrative conventions, and overall fantasy tropes ('"That is the Egg of the Phoenix," said Galaad. […] "I thought that was what it was," said Mrs. Whitaker.').[122] Galaad continuously tries for several days to strike a bargain for the Grail, but Mrs. Whitaker refuses to part with it, not because it is the Grail, but because it looks nice between the 'small soulful china basset hound and [the] photograph of her late

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[120] Gaiman, 'Chivalry', pp. 36, 37.
[121] Gaiman, 'Chivalry', p. 38.
[122] Gaiman, 'Chivalry', pp. 45-46.

husband, Henry, on the beach at Frinton in 1953'.[123] Finally, after being offered a

sword, a Phoenix Egg, the Philosopher's Stone and one of the apples of Hesperides,

Mrs. Whitaker accedes to trade the Grail for the Egg and the Stone because 'They'll

look nice on the mantelpiece. And two for one's fair'.[124] Galaad goes away satisfied

and the following Thursday Mrs. Whitaker discovers a quite possibly magical lamp

with a metal finger-ring tied to it, though in the end she decides to buy a novel

instead given that she has no place to put it anyway.

When describing the dynamics of certain liminal fantasies, Mendlesohn, often citing

McHale's 'rhetoric of contrastive banality', talks about the interchangeability of the

mundane with the fantastic in various liminal fantasies, and how that creates a

conflict in the reader. Dissonance is created when what the character sees as

fantastic is not what 'the reader' sees as fantastic, and results in ordinary things

being made fantastic and fantastic things being rendered mundane.[125] This is not

what is occurring in this story, or indeed in any of the other examples that will be

explored here. Utilising reader response criticism, it is possible to argue that there is

an ideal reader for whom, in the context of fantasy fiction, 'the fantastic' is not

necessarily equal to what a non-ideal reader would consider fantastic. Instead, if a

dissonance is to be identified, these reactions to the fantastic on the part of certain

protagonists reveal that it is to be found between readers, not between the reader and

the text. Mrs. Whitaker, through previous interactions with fantasy (be it personally

or as a reader) can be said to be 'genre savvy', possessing fantasy knowingness.

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[123] Gaiman, 'Chivalry', p. 36.
[124] Gaiman, 'Chivalry', p. 47.
[125] Mendlesohn, pp. 192, 193.

Good Omens, Gaiman's collaborative novel with Terry Pratchett, does not lack for aware characters either, particularly in the form of Aziraphale and Crowley, an angel and demon who try to stop the rise of the Antichrist and oncoming apocalypse.[126] Though they know that each of the sides they work for are in favour of the end of the world, the two have grown to appreciate humanity from their continual association with them for about six thousand years. They can be described as half-opportunists (they are more aware of the state of events than other characters and therefore make certain decisions to try to affect the course of events) and half-reluctant participants (as embodiments of the good-versus-evil archetype, they know what their job is – what their part in the story is – but are not happy about it).

Unlike Mrs. Whitaker who is almost blatantly aware of Story (she knows Knights quest for Grails), but seemingly indifferent to the fantastic, Aziraphale and Crowley are more peripherally aware of Story (which is to say, they are unaware they themselves are in a story as much as they are aware of their quasi-comical existence as archetypes in the Great [Ineffable] Plan) but completely and inherently aware of the fantastic (by virtue of being fantastic themselves). In this sense, the 'fantastic' or fantasy they are aware of, because of its deep roots in myth, is twofold; it is both fantasy within the world being described and fantasy as an intertextual product. What makes them stand out from the other supernatural beings in the novel (Hastur, Ligur, Beelzebub, the Metatron, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse) is that they are self-aware of their roles, the absurdity and the implications of them. The other beings merely accomplish their tasks unquestioningly ('Fourteenth-century minds, the lot of them' Crowley calls them) and are firmly secure in their narrative position

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[126] Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch* (New York: HarperTouch, 2006).

of, to use Mendlesohn's taxonomy, 'intrusive' fantasy, adhering to destiny, i.e. the plot, blindly.[127]

Conversely, Aziraphale and Crowley, the latter in particular, are established as characters who know what is going on. This is suggested from the very start of the book, in the paratextual epigraph: 'The authors would like to join the demon Crowley in dedicating this book to the memory of G.K. Chesterton; A man who knew what was going on'.[128] Gaiman and Pratchett (or the implied authors – which makes the notion of 'created work' even more transparent) situate Crowley outside the narrative as either co-creator or accomplice, suggesting that he knows the story (i.e. 'this book') is a story, or at the most, aware of it as a 'narrative': 'A narrative of Certain Events occurring in the last eleven years of human history'.[129] This informs the reader, from the beginning, that Crowley (and later Aziraphale, who could be seen as his accomplice/confidant) is on a different narrative level to the other characters; one that is more analogous to the reader themselves. Specifically referring to Chesterton as 'a man who knew what was going on' further reinforces this emerging but permeating sense of knowingness.

While neither the demon nor the angel express their regards directly to Story (though it can be argued that both the narrator and Anathema at one point do express this), they often refer to their condition as pawns of the Plan – a plan that, narratively speaking, is built on biblical and mythological references.[130] 'The future

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[127] Gaiman and Pratchett, *Good Omens*, p. 19.
[128] Gaiman and Pratchett, *Good Omens*, p. ix.
[129] Gaiman and Pratchett, *Good Omens*, p. 7.
[130] At the beginning of the novel, after the babies (including the Antichrist) are switched by the Satanist Nuns of the Chattering Order of Saint Beryl, the narrator pauses to directly address the reader: 'It would be nice to think that the Satanist Nuns had the surplus baby – Baby B – discreetly

has its own ideas on this. It was all in The Book', is what the narrator informs the reader regarding certain characters' opinions of what their future holds.[131] While other characters, like Anathema and Newton Pulsifier are propelled forward by The Book (Agnes Nutter's book) and thus, in essence, by the plot, Aziraphale and Crowley move outside of it all the while being aware of the need to give the impression of moving according to its (Fate, the Plan or the Book) mandate.[132] Indeed, the novel's objective – to subvert fate and destiny – is arguably an example of trying to escape what Pratchett has called, in his *Discworld* series, 'narrative causality'.[133] The world of *Good Omens* exists in a Story-shaped world, one which is largely shaped by the conventions of pseudo-biblical narratives, appropriated as myth-based stories, which have then been pastiched together under an all-myths-are-true trope. The characters' awareness of these myths, their continuation, and their inner workings enables the reader to maintain their own awareness of the underlying story-building. This is made more apparent in Gaiman's later novel *American Gods* (*AG*).[134]

Both in interviews and in *AG*, Gaiman has expressed the views that telling stories, and using stories in order to tell stories (the essence of metafiction, for it is in the

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adopted. […] You don't want to know what *could* have happened to Baby B. We like your version better, anyway' (p. 40). Later, when Anathema loses her book on prophecies, she attempt to find it by 'theatrically giving up, sitting down, and letting her glance fall naturally on a patch of earth which, if she had been in any decent narrative, should have contained the book. It didn't' (Gaiman and Pratchett, *Good Omens*, pp. 115-116).

[131] Gaiman and Pratchett, *Good Omens*, p. 42.

[132] Examples include: '"Of course, we knew something was going on," Aziraphale said', referring to the birth of the Antichrist (p. 45); 'I can't interfere with divine plans', 'Your side can't do anything without it being part of the ineffable divine plan' and 'Anyway, why're we talking about this *good* and *evil*? They're just names for sides. *We* know that' (pp. 57, 58).

[133] 'Stories, great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time, have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time; […] their very existence overlays a faint but insistent pattern on the chaos that is history. Stories etch grooves deep enough for people to follow. This is called the theory of narrative causality and it means that a story, once started, *takes a shape*' (Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad* (London: Corgi Books, 1992), p. 12).

[134] Gaiman, *American Gods* (New York: HarperTorch, 2001).

recognition of the storytelling mode that the reader fully interacts with the story) is the way in which not only can the reasons why stories are told in the first place be explored, but how readers and writers make sense of their own world:

> […] the *fantastique* offers a road-map – a guide to the territory of the imagination, for it is the function of imaginative literature to show us the world we know, but from a different direction.[135]

> *One describes a tale best by telling the tale. You see? The way one describes a story, to oneself or to the world, is by telling the story. It is a balancing act and it is a dream. The more accurate the map, the more it resembles the territory. The most accurate map possible would be the territory, and thus would be perfectly accurate and perfectly useless. The tale is the map that is the territory. You must remember this.* – from the Notebook of Mr. Ibis.[136]

Most of the gods in *AG*, by recognising their existence depends on the persistence and transmission of their stories, thereby induce this self-same recognition in the reader. The old gods in the novel were brought over to the United States in the minds and stories of humans, and are therefore aware of the importance of myth and legend:

> When the people came to America they brought us with them. They brought me [Wednesday], and Loki and Thor, Anansi and the Lion-God, Leprechauns and Kobolds and Banshees, Kubera and Frau Holle and Ashtaroth, and they brought you. We rode here in their minds, and we took root. […] Our true believers passed on, or stopped believing, and we were left, lost and scared and dispossessed […]. [137]

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[135] Neil Gaiman, 'Reflections on Myth', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 31 (1999), 75-84 (p. 80).
[136] Gaiman, *American Gods*, p. 545. This is repeated verbatim in 'The Mapmaker' short story in *Fragile Things* (2006).
[137] Gaiman, *American Gods*, p. 137. See also pp. 93, 97, 100, 101, 196, 226, and 330.

In addition, there are frequent references on the part of the characters to story (Mr. Nancy argues with Wednesday that 'a story's a good way of getting someone on your side' as justification for telling legends about himself) and to the fictionality of history ('The important thing to understand about American history, *wrote Mr. Ibis, [...]*, is that it is fictional'). They also allude to the need to adhere to certain story conventions:[138]

> Wednesday stared at Shadow with his mismatched eyes. […] "I brought you mead to drink because it's traditional. And right now we need all the tradition we can get. It seals our bargain."[139]

More than this it is the character's knowingness of this reliance upon narrative and narrative conventions that bonds with the reader's knowingness of the same, establishing a relationship between reader and text. The character of Shadow is also a curious case in that his unfazed reactions to the fantastic events transpiring around him do not implicitly refer to an awareness of Story and Fantasy (as can be determined from the gods' behaviours) but oversaturation.[140] This can also be taken as reflective of a reader who is made all the more aware of their own capacity for taking the fantastic for granted and just going with it unquestioningly. While he is not expertly familiar with myth and fantasy, he recognises it for what it is, which enables him to cope, and even avoid several of the tropes.[141]

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[138] Gaiman, *American Gods*, pp. 134, 92. And in fact, here the paratext is also metafictional in that it contains a 'Caveat and Warning for Travelers' that states: 'This is a work of fiction, not a guidebook. […] Only the gods are real.' (p. ix) This is made all the more ironic by the already mentioned statements by Mr. Ibis regarding fiction as a roadmap.

[139] Gaiman, *American Gods*, p. 37.

[140] Gaiman, *American Gods*, pp. 343-344.

[141] Wednesday even points this out to him at one point, and it is also what propels Shadow to offer himself as sacrifice because that is what one does in those types of stories.

The main protagonist in *Neverwhere*, Richard Mayhew, is also guilty of this as he progresses from the stereotypical baffled everyman who has been thrust into the fantasy territory to a more aware character:

> As lost as he was in this strange other-world, he was at least learning to play the game. His mind was too numb to make any sense of where he was, or why he was here, but it was capable of following the rules.[142]

And:

> Somewhere inside Richard a small, reasonable voice pointed out that there never was an Atlantis, and thus emboldened, went on to state that there were no such things as angels, and that, furthermore, most of his experiences of the last few days had been impossible. Richard ignored it. He was learning, awkwardly, to trust his instincts, and to realize that the simplest and most likely explanations for what he had seen and experienced recently were the ones that had been offered to him – no matter how unlikely they might seem.[143]

He not only starts taking things in stride, be begins thinking, in a way, according to narrative causality because he has 'gone beyond the world of metaphor and simile into the place of things that *are*, and it was changing him'.[144] In short, Richard starts to utilize a sense of knowingness - a recognition of certain rules, patterns and conventions that will enable him to better interact with his fantasy surrounding. If the fantastic can stop or diminish being surprising (though not necessarily wondrous) to the characters through prolonged exposure because at some point it must become expected and natural, then the same can reasonably be expected of the fantasy reader.

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[142] Gaiman, *Neverwhere* (New York: HarperTouch, 1996), p. 102.
[143] Gaiman, *Neverwhere,* pp. 200-201.
[144] Gaiman, *Neverwhere,* p. 307.

This kind of character is more and more frequent in Gaiman's narratives, as though his creations have no other choice but be created out of genre and narrative causality. The woman in 'The October Tale' who finds a djinn, the old lady in 'Adventure Story' who reacts to the Indiana Jones/Allan Quatermain-type fantasy adventures her husband had as though they were on the same level of interest as just another 'break from routine', or the version of Snow White in 'The Sleeper and the Spindle' are further examples of this.

Conclusions

In *Rhetorics*, Mendlesohn accurately states that these fantasies 'rest on knowingness or genre expectation, without which neither of the two dynamics of liminal fantasy [irony and equipoise] is possible', but, as seen, the knowingness and expectation does not solely derive from the reader.[145] In the case of aware protagonists, it is not that these characters react with apparent intelligence – although they can also do this – but that they react with knowingness. A character's aware behaviour toward the fantastic, not in the sense that they might be fantastic in themselves (as existing within a portal, intrusive or immersive fantasy) but in that they react to it knowing the way in which it is fantastic, reveals this. With the Armitage family, which Mendlesohn cites often, and Gaiman's aware characters it is not that they are familiar enough with the fantastic that they are immune or unfazed by it. It is not the fantasy they are reacting to, it is to fantasy story. Their knowingness is not about the inner workings of fantasy (as in the realm of Faerie) but of Fantasy (as in the genre) and of structures of fantastic narrative. It is because of this that they can be said to

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[145] Mendlesohn, p. 199.

operate as mirrors or reflections of the ideal knowing reader – the reader who is familiar with Fantasy as a genre and who knows what to expect – on whichever conscious level) in terms of narrative tropes, archetypes and general genre probability. For metafantasy, the genre-aware protagonist serves as a personification of the intertextual-connections-knowledge of the Fantasy-reader, that is, of the connections (i.e. experience) the reader possesses by virtue of being a fantasy reader.

These characters are not reflecting aspects of 'real life' or the 'real world', they are instead reflecting a relationship (demonstrated by their aware behaviour) to fantasy, not as a real thing or in a real context, but according to underlying unspoken narrative rules. Mrs. Whitaker expresses unsurprised at Galaad's arrival not necessarily because she has experienced that sort of thing before (which she might have) or because she lives in an immersive fantasy landscape where knights roam the countryside in search for mystical mythical relics (which, technically she does), but because narratologically-speaking that is the expected consequence (or one of the expected consequences, at least) to finding the Grail in a story.[146] Like her, genre-aware characters are guilty of exhibiting knowingness (which can then be translated into genre expectations and genre savviness). They recognize, however subtly, that their universe is Story-shaped, so they can behave according to the rules of 'narrativium' or against it, thus forcing the reader to acknowledge that they knew this fact as well.[147]

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[146] Ultimately, all fantasy fiction is 'immersive' (if ascribing to Mendlesohn's categories) on the simple fact that the fantastic is impossible in the 'real world'. Even fantasies that begin by being set in a world that is mimetically 'equal' to the actual world from are technically immersive.

[147] Terry Pratchett, *The Science of Discworld* (London: Random House, 2002), p. 10.

If the story is the map that is the territory of imagination (which itself is comprised of story and is responsible for creating story), then stories about Story produce intertextual maps to interconnected landscapes. The fantasy reader, familiar with the territory, however vast and complex it is, is then capable of recognizing certain features in the land, as well as also capable of identifying the fellow traveller in this land, even when they happen to be fictitious citizens of this very same place. The characters, by being similarly acquainted with Story (i.e. with the map to the land they inhabit) to whichever degree, meet the reader halfway between the inside and outside of the fiction, in the meta/hypertextual boundaries. Here reader and character agree to share their knowledge in order to traverse the simultaneously familiar and new territory.[148]

As seen, several kinds of 'aware' readers have been examined, and those who are unaware of the fantasy dynamics and narrative structures can also be accounted for. If, as argued, aware protagonists reflect aspects of the ideal readers, then readers with knowingness ranging from those with a passing familiarity with Fantasy and Story (as echoed by Mrs. Whitaker), those who grow from unfamiliarity to recognition (mirrored by Richard), those who are unfazed by the fantastic through oversaturation (like Shadow), those who can recognise the basic underlying narrative from the beginning (like with Aziraphale and Crowley, or the gods in *AG*) or those who revel in the awareness of the fictionality and fantasy of reality and vice versa (as reflected by Mr. Ibis) can all be identified.

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[148] Gaiman's descriptions of *Stardust*, a novel blatantly constructed upon Story, accurately addresses this duality: 'it's a story you haven't heard before, but once it's done it should feel like a story you're known all your life' (Nick Stechfield, 'Faerie Tales', *SFX*, 55 (1999), 56-58 (p. 58)).

Finally, if any estrangement is to occur between reader and text it will be, as in the case of parody, pastiche and retellings, brought about by a lack of recognition and identification on the part of the reader. While this is, within reader response criticism, also an acceptable and valid response, it must be acknowledged to be one that does not comply with the prompts and cues being suggested by the transtextual interactions of the text. The fact that, as Chris Dowd has said of Gaiman's fiction, these are stories 'populated by writers, film directors, puppet masters, actors, oral storytellers, […] a king of stories, [… and] audiences […witnessing] a new play, […listening to] unbelievable tale[s] of werewolves, magic, and love' where 'Gaiman's focus on the audience emphasizes the function of a story more than the content of the story' in order to 'allow us to see the relationship between the audience and the storyteller in a new way', effectively '[instructs] us [on] how we should behave'.[149] If this form betrays the structures, patterns, and functions of the genre and of storytelling with the genre of fantasy by throwing 'slabs of mythology, fairy tale, and horror onto the autopsy table [...,] turning them inside out to see how they are built […beckoning] us closer to have a look at the carcass' – though a more accurate analogy would include the putting back together of that carcass into a new living creature similar but distinct from its constituent parts – then the reader of these must be a willing 'co-conspirator'. They must be lifted out of their 'voyeuristic fantasy', as Dowd puts it, and into active participation in the acknowledgement and creation of the genre.

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[149] Dowd, 'An Autopsy of Storytelling', in *The Neil Gaiman Reader*, ed. by Darrell Schweitzer, p. 103.

Chapter 4: Fantasy and Metafantasy

Section 1: Genre Evolution

J.J. Pierce begins *Odd Genre* not by attempting to define genre, per se, nor attempting to argue for science fiction (sf) as a genre, but offering an overview of the very difficult history terms such as 'sf' and 'genre' have had, and where they stood in 1994. Like many genre theorists and literary critics, Pierce draws a comparison between language and literature, and pays particular attention to the very inconstant literary history of the word and concept of 'genre':

> Language evolves. Words and their definitions change. 'Genre,' a word that once designated such distinct types of literary expression as the novel, short story or essay, is now used almost universally to designate a certain form of popular fiction. Science fiction is thus a 'genre,' like the women's romance, the mystery or the Western. Publishers usually call such forms 'categories,' and they mean the same thing that fans and critics mean by 'genres' – or do they? […] One solution to the problem of terminology, adopted by Peter Nicholls in *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (1979), is 'genre sf' – used to distinguish science fiction published and identified as such from works like *Nineteen Eighty-four* that are not. Yet that distinction between 'genre sf' and nongenre works regarded as sf breaks down in the case of writers who once appeared only in genre outlets and may still be published there, but who have found wide acceptance elsewhere – how are we to classify Ray Bradbury, or Ursula Le Guin, in terms of genre?
>
> Even the seemingly rigid bounds of commercial publishing categories now seem to be breaking down.[1]

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[1] John J. Pierce, *Odd Genre: A Study in Imagination and Evolution* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 3.

Clute makes similar distinctions between the genre of fantasy and genre fantasy

(GF) works, calling the later a form whose 'main distinguishing characteristic is

that, on being confronted by an unread GF book, one *recognizes* it; one has been

here before, and the territory into which the book takes one is familiar – it is

FANTASYLAND'.[2] More than this, Clute considers genre fantasy not to be

representative of fantasy at all, 'but a comforting revisitation of cosy venues,

creating an effect that is almost anti-fantasy', which 'goes exactly counter to the

purpose of the full fantasy, which is to release or even to catapult the reader into

new areas of the imagination'.[3] It would perhaps be more accurate to conclude that

genre fantasy is what certain readers, spurred by marketable and recognizable

tropes, think of when they think of the genre of fantasy. It is the genre, reduced to a

specific set of recognizable and reusable pieces, shuffled and reshuffled without

consideration for the process itself, for the storytelling act or the implications of its

elements.

The problem with excluding genre fantasy (as with genre sf) from the overall

Fantasy category is that genre fantasy is entirely dependent and reliant on this

connection to the category/medium.[4] It can only, and only did emerge, from a

recognition of the existence of a category in the first place, which then transformed

into a push for the production of 'reassuring works' within this category. Genre

fantasy, in becoming formulaic, restricts its own possibilities. It is here that the

'genre' becomes and has become automatized, and it is because of this that it has

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[2] John Clute, 'Genre Fantasy', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant
(London: Orbit, 1999), p. 396.
[3] Clute, p. 396.
[4] See the discussions on Sandner's in chapter one, as well as Sandner's 'Theorizing the Fantastic:
Editing *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* and the Six Stages of Fantasy Criticism', *Journal of
the Fantastic in the Arts*, 4 (2006), pp. 277-301.

evolved into newer subgenres and responsive alternative styles within the overall

Fantasy, in attempts to defamiliarize it.[5]

Given the recognition-condition of genre fantasy, it might be tempting to consider

this a form of metafantasy. However, while genre fantasy narratives involve

revisitations to the landscape of fantasyland, they seldom involve a critical

perspective or analysis of these revisitations granted by metafiction. Metafantasy,

then, is not so much a subgenre, a transformation of Fantasy, or even a countergenre,

but a type of narrative which offers a genre-centric (structurally, narratively, and

transtextually, or in other words *meta*fictionally) deconstruction (analysis and

synthesis/ critical commentary), on various levels (from the blatantly direct, to the

more subtle reader-reliant hypertextually indirect). Clute faintly suggests this

meeting place between genre fantasy and metafantasy when he lists various authors

who, by utilising GF to present philosophical arguments, make ironic points, or for

the purposes of parody, are able to cast off the constraints of GF.[6]

In establishing the particulars of the relationship between fantasy and metafantasy

then, the concept of 'evolution' as defined and expanded by various modern genre

theorists makes a suitable starting point. Questions such as whether metafantasy

narratives are still fantasy, whether one is an inevitable and natural progression from

the other, or whether metafantasy narratives can occur without them also being

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[5] 'AUTOMATIZATION The process whereby literary devices or entire genres lose their potency and cease to be perceived as artistic entities as a result of formulaic repetition and over-familiarity' (David Duff, ed., 'Key Concepts', in *Modern Genre Theory* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), pp. x-xvi (p. x); 'DEFAMILIARIZATION The process by which literary works challenge and refresh our habitual perceptions of the world – and of language itself – by using words in unfamiliar ways, or by other artistic devices for slowing down and intensifying the reader's perception' (Duff, p. xi).

[6] The key word is 'utilise' as it signals to an object as a whole, a genre, form, or mode, identifiable as 'fantasy' which can be used as a tool upon itself.

fantasy, and what these mean for the relationship between the two, can be addressed and answered from this genre-theory standpoint. In establishing what the relationship between fantasy and metafantasy entails, this perspective also sheds light on questions such as what metafantasy is: a form that acts upon the genre of fantasy, a tangential form that emerges from fantasy, or a new nascent genre (or subgenre) in itself.

Metafantasy as Genre Evolved from Fantasy

David Duff defines evolution as 'a metaphor widely used in modern genre theory to denote the process by which literary genres (and other elements of literature) change across time'.[7] Following the Russian Formalists, Duff lists several necessary conditions of this process: 1. 'that literary evolution is discontinuous'; 2. 'that the evolution of a particular genre cannot be understood from the genre-system as a whole'; 3. 'that genre is defined by function as well as form, and that functions as well as forms evolve', to which, following Attebery, it is possible to add 'mode' as another way genre is defined, and that metafictive changes in function, form and mode can affect the genre in different ways; 4. that, citing Viktor Shklovsky, 'a new form arises not in order to express a new content [as Veselovsky had maintained], but because the old form has exhausted its possibilities' (additions are Duff's), though Fowler's 'changes of scale' can be used to refute this idea that new forms arise solely when the old one exhausts itself, i.e., reaches a complete state of

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[7] Duff, 'Key Concepts', p. xi.

automatization; and 5. that there is an ever-changing hierarchy of genres, i.e., that subgenres can rise to supplant older genres as the dominant form of that genre.[8]

Important, then, to identifying the dynamics of the relationship between fantasy and metafantasy is recognising the latter's distinct metafictive approach to the features, devices and functions of the genre. Yury Tynyanov argues that the 'whole point of a new construction may be in the new use to which old devices are put, in their new constructive significance', though the sense of genre is maintained through a sufficient preservation of certain features, a sufficiency, which he posits, 'lay [sic] not in the "fundamental" or the "important" distinctive features of the genre, but in the secondary ones, in those features which are as it were taken for granted and which seem not to characterise the genre at all'.[9] If the fundamental characteristic of fantasy is generally agreed to be 'the impossible', or specifically the approach to the impossible as possible while still being aware of its impossibility in order to experience wonder – which in turn makes fantasy metafictional (see Chapter One), then one of the ways in which metafantasy might offer new constructive significance is by creating new uses for the impossible.[10] The sufficiency of genre-cohesiveness between fantasy and metafantasy would then be maintained through the secondary features and repurposing of devices (such as transtextuality of taproots, genre awareness, etc. as discussed in Chapter Three).

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[8] Duff, ed., 'Introduction', in *Modern Genre Theory*, pp. 1-24 (p. 7

[9] Yury Tynyanov, 'The Literary Fact', *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by David Duff (Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), pp. 29-49 (pp. 35, 31).

[10] Attebery's 'the fundamental premise of fantasy is that the things it tells not only did not happen but *could* not have happened' is coupled with the mimetically familiar (be it the actual realistic or the intertextually mimetic) to create wonder (Attebery, *Stories About Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 4); 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula' in *Fantastic Literature A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Sandner (Westport, CT: Prager Publishers, 2004) pp. 293-309, p. 309). Also, Wolfe identifies fantasy's fundamental feature as being the impossible: 'whatever we are to call "fantasy" must first and foremost deal with the impossible' (Gary Wolfe, 'The Encounter With Fantasy', in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, pp. 222-235 (p. 222)).

The relationship between fantasy and metafantasy would then be dependent on the way in which these features and devices are reconstructed for, as Tynyanov puts it, 'the whole essence of a "new form" lies in the new principle of construction, in the new use made of the relationship between the constructive factor and the subservient factors – the material'.[11] Applied to the genre's history, fantasy took a wide range of pre-textual fragments and constructed them into a genre; metafantasy takes that genre's features and deconstructs them again, breaking the genre into new fragments and factors, in order to use them to rebuild new stories. Where the fragments are cut and deconstructed is not the same as they were before, therefore their new reconstruction is distinct from both fantasy and its taproots, but also inexorably connected to it. This is akin to Ireneusz Opacki's 'blood relations' idea, where:

> [If the] concept of genre is based on the invariability of the features of its structure, the answer [to whether or not a literary genre becomes another when entering into a relation with another genre] would have to be yes. But in [his] formulation, the answer is no.[12]

Opacki's formulation is essentially the same as Tynyanov's wherein a sense of unity is maintained through a fundamental commonness. With fantasy and metafantasy, if considered structurally, then they are different genres because each interacts with their features and devices in different, intrinsically variable, ways. Compare, for example, the story-building usage of princesses, pirates, and castles in older fantasies (as in MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, Barrie's *Peter Pan*, or Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*) with their usage in Goldman's *The*

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[11] Tynyanov, p. 37.
[12] Ireneusz Opacki, 'Royal Genres', in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by David Duff, pp 118-126 (p. 122).

Princess Bride as recognisable fantasy and fairytale tropes, or the use of wizards and magic in *The Lord of the Rings* against that in the *Discworld* novels (compare further the difference between the usage of Norse mythology in *The Broken Sword* with that usage in *American Gods,* or the fairies in MacDonald's novels with those in *The Sandman*). One aspires to write nostalgically about elements with an ancient past in order to create fantastically impossible and wondrous tales, while the other subverts and deconstructs with those self-same elements, calling attention to the process of fantasy-creation. In essence, one is subversive of reality when it uses these features, and the other is subversive of the genre.

On the other hand, they still possess this 'blood relation' as both take impossible elements, or more specifically, narratives about the impossible and react metafictionally to them in order to compose story. Opacki proposes the following model:

> If we formulate the model (form) of a given genre in a series of letters, which symbolise the components of its structure: *a b c d e f*; and if the royal genre of the subsequent literary trend has, by common consent, the form: *k l m n o p*, among which *m n o* are the main constitutive features of the genre; then the earlier literary genre, entering into the literary trend, will take on these important new features, at the same time keeping part of the former ones: *b c d m n o f*. A new form of the genre arises which lasts while the given literary current does. The features *m n o* draw to themselves all the genres on this stage of evolution; the remaining features make for differences among the genres.[13]

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[13] Opacki, p. 122.

This mathematically-linguistic model can be adjusted to suggest that if the genre of fantasy (X) is structurally composed of a b c d e f – its taproots and its metafictive relationship to them – so that X=a b c d e f, and metafantasy (Y) is structurally composed of X a f k l m o p, so that Y=X{a b c d e f}a f l m o p – fantasy, its features, and non-fantasy features – then the unifying relationship between the two is in their being or containing X (fantasy). Their differences are then found in the 'remaining features', i.e., in the additional elements brought by metafantasy that would not be considered strictly fantasy. The question concerning fantasy and metafantasy is then whether it is accepted to modify the genre, as Opacki suggests. If it does and metafantasy is regarded as still being part of the genre of fantasy, then fantasy must now be regarded as containing features that were not before considered to be fantasy. This is not so unheard of, as features and characteristics are added that transform the perceptions of a genre all the time; the elves and fairies in MacDonald are not the same as in Dunsany's, nor Tolkien's nor Salvatore's, for example, but all are still recognisably fantasy. Similarly, the urban setting of Tad Williams' *War of the Flowers*, for instance, is not any less fantasy than the pastoral countryside or enchanted forests in *Lord of the Rings*, though all additions and changes serve to transform the perspectives writers, readers, and critics have of the genre.[14]

Michael Braxandall's remarks concerning influence in art history, which Attebery has used in analysing the relationship between fantasy and its taproots, further expands on this evolutionary perspective:

> 'Influence' is a curse on art criticism primarily because of its wrong-headed
> grammatical prejudice about who is the agent and who the patient: it seems

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[14] Tad Williams, *War of the Flowers* (London: Orbit, 2003).

to reverse the active/passive relation which the historical actor experiences and the inferential beholder will wish to take into account. If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than Y did something to X. But in the consideration of good pictures and painters the second is always the more lively reality[…]. If we think of Y rather than X as the agent, the vocabulary is much richer and more attractively diversified: draw on, resort to, avail oneself of, appropriate from, have recourse to, adapt, misunderstand, refer to, pick up, take on, engage with, react to, quote, differentiate oneself from, assimilate oneself to, assimilate, align oneself with, copy, address, paraphrase, absorb, make a variation on, revive, continue, remodel, ape, emulate, travesty, parody, extract from, distort, attend to, resist, simplify, reconstitute, elaborate on, develop, face up to, master, subvert, perpetuate, reduce, promote, respond to, transform, tackle …—everyone will be able to think of others. Most of these relations just cannot be stated the other way round—in terms of X acting on Y rather than Y acting on X. To think in terms of influence blunts thought by impoverishing the means of differentiation.[15]

From an evolutionary standpoint, it could be easy to assume that fantasy 'influences' metafantasy, but if it is seen as metafantasy containing the possibilities of fantasy, then metafantasy emerges as a response to fantasy, and transforms how the genre is regarded entirely. As fantasy responds to its taproots and transforms them into modern fantasy, so does metafantasy react to fantasy, which is how metafantasy is fundamentally connected to fantasy. Applied to fantasy, these metaphors are also similar to Tolkien and Lloyd Alexander's analogy of the Cauldron Pot of Story, which is also often used when discussing the fantasy's taproot texts and inherent intertextuality. In 'On Fairy Stories', Tolkien speaks about the 'Pot of Soup' and explains how 'by "the soup" [he] mean[s] the story as it is served up by its author or

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[15] Michael Braxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 58-59.

teller, and by "the bones" its sources or material—even when (by rare luck) those can be with certainty discovered'.[16] This soup has 'always been boiling', i.e., Story has always existed in one manner or another, with new ingredients being added to it throughout history.[17] As events happen, as influencing figures emerge, as imagination and ideas rise, they are all chucked into the pot (these are the 'bones'), and it is from this that the writer ladles out new stories.

Alexander elaborates on these ingredients further stating that:

> The pot holds a rich and fascinating kind of mythological minestrone. Almost everything has gone into it, and almost anything is likely to come out of it: morsels of real history spiced — and spliced — with imaginary history, fact and fancy, daydreams and nightmares.[18]

The complexity of the metatext is thus illustrated, where pinpointing specific taproots and historically tracing fundamental details becomes nigh impossible, as the interconnecting web of story is as homogenous as a stout stew. Moreover, Tolkien suggests that the 'fairy-tale element' is already there in the Cauldron, 'waiting for the great figures of Myth and History… when they are cast into the simmering stew'.[19] How this fairytale element got into the pot is not addressed, though it might be presumed to have gotten in in the same manner as everything else. At the same time, it is more likely that, like Story, it emerged solely from the pot, not as an individual recognizable element thrown in, but as a result of the combination of

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[16] J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', in *The Monster and the Critic and other Essays*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2006), pp. 109-161 (p. 120).
[17] Tolkien, p. 125.
[18] Lloyd Alexander, 'High Fantasy and Heroic Romance', *The Horn Book Magazine* (December 1971) <http://archive.hbook.com/magazine/articles/1970s/dec71_alexander.asp> [accessed 3 November 2014].
[19] Tolkien, p. 127.

more primordial elements. Thus, the 'fairytale element', which can more critically be called 'modern fantasy elements', is more akin to the stock itself, where its constituent elements were blended as to become indistinguishable. This stock, then, constitutes one of the secondary fundamental features of the genre, its original ingredients (its taproots) dissolved into the essence of wonder and marvel that permeates it, which united with the doublethink-awareness necessary for engaging with the taproots, gives rise to the primary fundamental feature, its impossibility. New components may be thrown in, from history, genres, modes, etc., or the Cook might ladle the soup over another trend, thereby either changing the soup or the trends, giving rise to new forms and possibilities each time. How (e.g., fantastically, meaning impossible realities) and for what purpose it is ladled (e.g., to tell stories), is, as mentioned, the primary fundamental characteristics of the genre. The question then becomes whether metafantasy is a wholly different pot of soup or an addition that has rendered the fantasy pot irrevocably transformed.

If it is accepted that because metafantasy responds to a generic perspective on fantasy, utilising enough of its features (secondary or primary) to create its metafantastic narratives then, like Opacki poses, metafantasy can be regarded as the genre evolution of fantasy. It is a metafictive narrative of a metafictive genre that by being tied to or regarded as being that same genre succeeds in transforming it. In turn, fantasy becomes as it were, primed for metafantasy. Using Gaiman's novels as examples, for instance, demonstrated this potential evolutionary relationship. In *American Gods*, fantasy is both used and examined (see the examples in Chapter Two and Chapter Three about myth and storytelling). Where a novel like *The Broken Sword*, which retells Norse myths plays a metafictive game involving

intertextuality with pre-texts, the dual nature of the impossible-possible, and subversion of reality, the mythmaking and open references to storytelling and contemporary (twenty-first century) conceptions of storytelling in *American Gods* plays an additional metafictive game that subverts genre conventions and its storytelling mode. In being branded and considered 'fantasy', the novel succeeds in changing what the genre of fantasy is. But it is not merely a thematic or stylistic expansion of the genre, but a structural one that opens fantasy to encompass reflections and deconstructions of itself, even through narratives that seem to lack those fundamental traits of the genre.

However, because of the anachronistic (or regressive) nature of generic influence, such a perspective, though it sheds light on the difficulty of objectively categorizing a text as fantasy or not, ultimately diminishes and dissolves the genre. If metafantasy, in responding to fantasy, can also engage with elements and features that are not fantasy, but is as a whole considered to remain being fantasy merely for its responsive connection, then anything can be fantasy. Moreover, it means that contemporary fantasy cannot escape becoming and being metafantastic. A solution to this will be explored ahead in the section on countergenres.

Hierarchy of Genres

Opacki also posits that genre evolution can be propelled thanks to the literary trends that affect the hierarchy of genres. Though it must be reiterated that Opacki's usage of genre is closer to it as mode than as form, his statement that 'every literary trend brings forward and emphasises a different genre (or different genres), in which

different elements play a constitutive role' is useful.[20] By this, he means that the 'royal genres' of literature, primary and secondary, experience changes in literary trends so that, for example, the nineteenth-century Polish ballad's emphasis on the epic narrator shifted in favour of the dramatic construction as the primary royal genre of the poetic novel shifted to that of the secondary royal genre of the drama novel.[21] In other words, though the nineteenth-century ballad changed by adopting literary trends, it continued being the genre of the ballad, even if its structures or emphases were different. Fantasy and metafantasy reflect similar changes in the hierarchy of genres. Early-modern fantasy, having developed at a time when realism was a fundamental feature in literary fiction, naturally reflects this interest and focus by constructing impossible realities, and its metafictive subversion is targeted at this preoccupation.[22] After the advent of postmodernity, and with the influx of self-awareness that abounds in all aspects of mid-twentieth century culture, from academic criticism to popular media, the genre of fantasy has doubled its already metafictive constructions to reflect an awareness of the genre's impossibilities, of the critical way stories and stories about fantasy stories are constructed, and its place in reader/writer and reader/reader interactive metatexts.[23] Thus, characters behaving knowingly according to the laws of 'narrative causality' or displaying varying degrees of awareness of the storicity or storyness of the fantasy they are in, with no respect for their apparent self-contained realities, become possible and abundant.[24]

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[20] Opacki, p. 123.

[21] Opacki, p. 120.

[22] '[…] fantasy usually [prefers] unreal worlds developed and presented in a spirit of realism, combining the real and unreal' (Gary Westfahl, ed., *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 772).

[23] '[A] remainder of what has been, since the 1960s, a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world.' (Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 2).

[24] By 'storicity' and 'storyness' is meant the quality of story; as 'historicity' is the 'fact, quality, or character of being situated in history', so is storicity the quality of being situated in story (*OED.com*). Where fictionality would imply narrative unreality, storicity implies narrative provenance.

On a similar vein to this external genre influence on genre evolution, in his analysis

of the notion of the Cauldron of Story, Alexander argues that the changes to the

genre are not brought forth solely from the ingredients in the broth, but from

intentional creation. While Tolkien's analogy suggests that the soup is enriched with

each element thrown in, Alexander remarks that 'in accordance with one of

fantasy's own conventions – nothing is given for nothing', for though various

'nourishing bits and pieces' can be 'scooped out of the pot' such as 'whole

assortments of characters, events, and situations that occur again and again in one

form or another throughout much of the world's mythology', the 'conscious artist' is

still tasked with creative invention, finding 'essential content of his work within

himself, in his own personality, in his own attitude and commitment to real life', – a

perspective which can be said to be on a par with Opacki's royal genre influence,

from the point of view of the writer's experience. Thus, the elements thrown into the

pot, and those taken out, and the manner in which they are ladled in or out (implying

awareness and intentionality) is at the heart of the evolutionary transformation of a

genre. In addition, Alexander paints an alternate darker view to the entire process

suggesting that it is not necessarily as innocuous and idealistically positive as

Tolkien's metaphor implies. Alexander compares the Cauldron of Story to the Black

Cauldron from his *Chronicles of Prydain* series, which comes originally from the

Mabinogion manuscript and other Welsh legends, explaining how the cauldron that

is said to bring slain warriors back to life is actually a disfiguring tool at worst and a

silencing tool at best, stating that:

> The scholarly interpretation — the mythographic meaning — is a fascinating
> one that links together all the other meanings. Immersion in the cauldron

represented initiation into certain religious mysteries involving death and rebirth. The initiates, being figuratively — and perhaps literally — steeped in the cult mysteries, emerged reborn as adepts. In legend, those who came out of the cauldron had gained new life but had lost the power of speech. Scholars interpret this loss of speech as representing an oath of secrecy.[25]

Alexander elaborates further on how, when adapting the legend for *The Black Cauldron* (1965), the concept of the cauldron seemed 'sinister' to him:

> The muteness of the warriors created the horror I associated with the cauldron. Somehow, I felt that these voiceless men, already slain, revived only to fight again, deprived even of the oblivion of the grave, were less beneficiaries than victims.[26]

In being raised from the dead, Alexander considers the fate of the Cauldron-Born to be 'worse than death', as the 'victims' are, he feels, 'dehumanized' in the process.[27] In this sense, the cauldron is both restorative and ultimately (or perhaps insidiously) destructive. The parallels to the Cauldron of Story analogy are obvious; more than an amalgamation of various ingredients blended into soup, the pot's inherent magic (its storicity and the inherent recursiveness/metatextuality of Story) revives fantasy, genre, and story, but at the same time, it removes or restricts some aspects present in the fundamental features/elements of the archetypal elements used. With each new renewal (be it from having been thrown back into the cauldron or from external genre influence), a different genre emerges from the pot, accounting for the defamiliarization present, as Duff would argue, in genre evolution. The question, as with the metaphysics of the reanimation of the dead, continues being whether or not what comes out of the pot is intrinsically the same as what went in. Opacki and Duff

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[25] Alexander, 'High Fantasy', np.
[26] Alexander, 'High Fantasy', np.
[27] Alexander, 'High Fantasy', np.

would claim it is, while Fowler, as will be discussed in the countergenre section, would not.

Section 2: Practical Analysis

Gaiman's metafictive transformations of the taproots in the *Sandman* volume *Season of Mists* – the one Gaiman once called a 'house of cards out of suspension of disbelief' – can be used to explore this relationship from an evolutionary perspective.[28] The 'pot of soup' analogy seems better equipped than Gaiman's 'house of cards' to describe both the effect genre has on specific elements, tropes and traditions, as well as the effect these have and have had, in turn, on the genre, especially as they are reused, reconstituted, shifted and transformed with each subsequent narrative. It also has less fragile and precarious connotations regarding the metafictive process.

If a distinction can be and is to be drawn between fantasy and metafantasy, then it must be predicated on influence and dependency. *Season of Mists* sees a hodgepodge of mythological, folklore and fairytale personages – anthropomorphisations, personifications, and fictionalised iterations – arrive at the Dreaming (the realm which shapes and is shaped out of dreams) at the behest of Morpheus (Dream) who, having acquired the keys to Hell from an apathetic and disenchanted Lucifer, must choose which deity, demigod, fairy, or alternative supernatural being is best qualified to inherit them and gain dominion over Hell. As with the gods in *American Gods*, the beings in *Season* are narratively (within the

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[28] Lawrence Person, 'Gaiman, Interrupted: An Interview With Neil Gaiman', *Nova Express*, 5 (2000), pp. 1-10 (p. 6).

fiction and, more importantly, without) dependent on the myths they originated from.[29] Their existence, as they often reiterate, is, like the Dreaming itself, shaped out of (and in turn shapes) Story. In *Season*, and throughout the *Sandman*, they are Story and Belief incarnate, but metafictionally they signal toward their actual-world mythical counterparts.[30]

Moreover, their significance lies not merely in that they are referenced, but in the fact that their presence is already found as ingredients in the cauldron of Story from which the narrative is making the references. The ingredients that form *Sandman* are already in the pot of story and are used, in turn, to influence story and what the ingredients were before being added to the pot. It both is and is not the original product because it both contains and represents a form of the original but is not actually constituted in the same way as that original. At the same time, though that original does not retain its shape any longer, its essence is still present enough for references to be made to it.

Consider, for instance, the character of Cluracan, a reference to either the Irish sprite 'cluracaun' or the boggart 'cluricaun', compared by some folklorist to the mischievous leprechaun, whose only similarity with Gaiman's reinvention comes from the cluricaun's flamboyant dress and drunken style.[31] The doubling-up of the reference (or perhaps 'folding-up' is more accurate) comes from the fact that, named

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[29] Within, in the sense that they know their in-world existence is predicated on the belief of people and the perpetuation of their stories; without in the sense of intertextual meaning-making.
[30] On the subject of story and belief, consider Gaiman's explanation 'part of the point of **Sandman** is that all stories are true. All systems of belief are true. There's no point in there where you turn around and say "this is not a true system of belief." All systems of belief are completely true, this is part of what **Sandman** is about' (Person, p. 6).
[31] See Theresa Bane's *Encyclopedia of Fairies in World Folklore and Mythology* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), pp. 86-87; and Katharine Briggs' *A Dictionary of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies and Other Supernatural Creatures* (New York: Allen Lane, 1976), p. 77.

or otherwise (i.e., whether recognizably named by the reader or not), the aspect and folklore of the original creature was absorbed along with fantasy's other fairy(tale) taproots into the possibilities of the genre, and it is from this that the character is taking referential cues.[32] From George MacDonald and JM Barrie to Hope Mirlees, Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black, Tad Williams, Susanna Clarke, and Gaiman himself numerous times, fairies (in all forms and subspecies) are possibly the most indigenous population of the genre's landscape. This means, however, that original sources such as names of specific fairies or obscure species can become as removed from modern fantasy as homo sapiens is from its ancestors, meaning all that remains of them is their names as they have become entangled with the rest of the fairytale taproot.[33] In other words, the fact that Gaiman's Cluracan is a fairy – a traditional and recognizable fantasy element – is more significant in the transtextual metafiction taking place than his being a specific reference to the cluricaun sprite/boggart. While one cannot exist without the other (i.e., Cluracan the fairy cannot technically exist without the cluricaun sprite), the end product cannot truly exist without the fairy metatext carried and maintained by fantasy.

In creating a character that references this taproot but which is inevitably a product of the amalgamation of taproots (i.e., a product of fantasy), Gaiman succeeds in both affecting that taproot metafictionally, by pointing it out and ascribing later pre-texts to it, as well as fantasy metafantastically, by using it to deconstruct (however directly or not) itself and ascribing the genre of fantasy to it. Cluracan is then a product of fantasy's referencing a taproot of fantasy, revealing the dynamics and

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[32] Meaning, both from fairy lore taproots as well as fairytale taproots.
[33] This is something Tolkien also notes in 'On Fairy-Stories', saying how 'the bones' – a tales' 'sources or material' – can only 'by rare luck' be discovered with any certainty, meaning that the specific origins are less important than the fact that they are found in the pot of soup (Tolkien, p. 120).

structures of the genre; it bares the 'storicity' of fantasy and its intertextuality, on the page. This 'baring of the device' is made more explicit when the entire narrative engages in metafictive doubling, such as occurs in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' issue, or in the 'World's End' volume, to mention two such occasions.[34]

In 'World's End', several characters find themselves trapped by a freak reality-storm at an inn known as the World's End – a reference to Chesterton's 'inn at the end of the world' from the poem 'A Child of the Snows' – and pass the time telling stories. Each consecutive issue is a different story told by each patron, with some of the issues, like number five, containing as many as four stories nested within one another – what Gaiman interviewer, Lawrence Pierson, calls 'an Ouroboros structure' because of how some of the nested stories reference the framing story, and how the final issue reveals an even higher framing story. In issue two, Cluracan, who, as mentioned, had previously appeared in *Season of Mists*, tells a story set several centuries before, of being charged by Queen Mab – presumably the same Queen of the Fairies/Fae Titania previously seen in 'Midsummer' – to travel to the city of Aurelia in order to inquire after the psychopomp and ruler of the city, a man called Carys XXXV, Lord Carnifex (Latin for executioner), who had been taking some liberties above his station. Given the previous appearances of fairies in *The Sandman*, and given the way their stories were combinations of historical folk characters mixed with historical events, people and myth, it is curious to note the way in which Gaiman creates new settings and personages through Cluracan's story that seem to equally possess their own taproots and referents, even when they do not.

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[34] In actuality, this occurs so often throughout *The Sandman* that is it impractical to list all of them.

For example, one of the editors for the *Annotated Sandman*, David Goldfarb, noted that while names of the character Klaproth – a master of funerary rites from the Necropolis Litharge – and of the city of Aurelia can be compared to those of actual people, they bear no significance to Gaiman's character or the city.[35] Like these, Cluracan's journey is entirely fictitious, which is to say, it lacks intertextual referents.[36] In the issue, no story is being retold, transformed or referenced, no past of Cluracan is hinted at transtextually (for he has none), and no deeper, older stories are being mined and reformed.

At the same time, nonetheless, the purpose of Cluracan's tale and the manner in which it is told is as though this intertextual referencing and retelling process was taking place. In his essay 'Consorting with the Gods: Exploring Gaiman's Pan-pantheon', Harley J. Sims argues that Gaiman is 'engineering' pantheons, be they fairy, god, or other mythological pantheons, essentially utilizing the expectations of fantasy to pseudo-retrospectively create taproots.[37] Sims further argues that Gaiman is able to do this with certain characters because they are 'liminal beings' which the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* defines as beings that 'exist at the THRESHOLD of two states', namely those like Gandalf or Merlin, or as with beings like centaurs, who

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[35] Goldfarb notes how 'the OED uses several quotations from people named Klaproth: Julius von Klaproth, an 18th century traveler and writer; and Martin Heinrich Klaproth, a chemist after whom some minerals are named' and that 'a noble family of Imperial Rome bore the name "Aurelius". The city of Aurelia seems to be modeled on Rome in a number of ways'. Neither reference bears relation to the city portrayed of the funerary master (David Goldfarb, 'Issue 52', in *The Annotated Sandman*, ed. by Ralf Hildebrandt (2007), <http://www.arschkrebs.de/sandman/annotations/sandman.52.shtml> [accessed 15 September 2015]).

[36] Compare this to 'Midsummer Night's Dream' or 'The Song of Orpheus' where parts of the transtextual stories of the characters Gaiman repurposes are used and combined to serve as background for the narrative.

[37] Sims offers a wide range of examples, from Gaiman's uniting of *The Sandman* story-myth to the DC Comics universe, to the engineering of Cluracan and his sister Nuala, to the god Pharamond, whose name comes from a 'legendary fifth-century Frankish king' but whose pantheon and mythological qualities are completely invented by Gaiman.

possess uncanny knowledge and wisdom beyond the realms of the living and the dead.[38] Sims uses the term in a more metafictional way for beings that possess paratextual, intertextual and hypertextual knowledge, describing them as being 'as anachronistical as they are powerful', giving the example of characters such as the Genie from Disney's *Aladdin* (1992) or Q from the *Star Trek* universe. For Sims, these entities, for being narratively liminal (actually, metafictional) exist in a 'liberated' plane of reality that allows them to break narrative consistency rules, escape continuity inaccuracies, and become almost 'fictionality itself'.[39] Sims theorises that the reason Gaiman can get away with creating characters that appear to have mythological history, but are actually anachronistic taproots, is because he is 'exploiting the imaginative and multidimensional potential that is the very essence of story'.[40]

However, Sims' suggestion that 'they work not simply because they can always be explained, but because they can always be excused' implies that Gaiman's creation and confluence of myth-making and taproots derives not from this 'potential […] of story' but the product of some kind of narrative hand-waving.[41] Instead, genre evolution theory can suggest the alternative explanation that, if metafantasy is the evolutionary next step in fantasy genre, then it is one where full (meta)fictional and imaginary potentiality is allowed, or even inevitably obligatory. If fantasy is now,

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[38] Harley J. Sims, 'Consorting with the Gods: Exploring Gaiman's Pan-pantheon', in *The Mythological Dimensions of Neil Gaiman*, ed. by Anthony S. Burdge, Jessica Burke and Kristine Larsen (Crawfordville, FL: Kitsune Books, 2012), pp. 94-108 (p. 102). Roz Kaveney, 'Liminal Beings', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, pp. 581-582.

[39] Sims, p. 102. The dynamics here are more accurately described as metafictive because Sims is using 'liminal' in the sense of 'bordering', which in relation to narrative structure, 'metafiction' (beyond-fiction) is better equipped to describe.

[40] Sims, p. 102.

[41] It should be noted that Sims' arguments are largely made from a comic-book perspective instead of a strictly fantasy literature one, although he does reference 'Fantasy Studies', quotes Clute's encyclopaedia, and compares *The Sandman* to *American Gods* and *Neverwhere* in addition to analysing what are considered to be fantasy's taproots.

following Opacki's theory, comprised of the features of metafantasy, then it cannot escape reflecting itself and acknowledging the critical, self-conscious perception of the genre, in each narrative.

By fantasy being a genre that fundamentally deals with not just the impossible (content focus-wise) and story/storytelling (structurally) but a certain stance on the impossible and the impossible in story, an evolution of this might result in an increase and augmentation of these features, which would reflect back on how the other characteristics and features of the genre (the transtextuality of the taproots, the doubling awareness, etc.) are expressed. Tynyanov's sufficiency in genre evolution or Opacki's royal genres can also be applied here, where the fundamental features change or the primary genres shift to secondary ones. Here, these features shift to become more prominent and affect how the other elements are viewed and rendered.

Indeed, the very point of the story of 'World's End' is the act of retelling stories, that is, storytelling, one of the genre's main features, is purposefully brought to the forefront and exploited. In addition, by using characters and places that appear to be metafictionally intertextual and making use of the retelling tradition expected of the genre, Gaiman is able to grant his non-referential characters – Klaproth, Carys, Cluracan, and even Mab – a sense of ancientness of story commonly reserved for the genre's actual taproots, because he acknowledges that this is a feature in the genre, therefore it is granted to the characters.[42] This is then combined with the narrative impossibility of characters knowing and discussing their own fictionality and

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[42] Mab was Shakespeare's creation and not directly part of any folkloric tradition, except through a theorized connection to the Celtic Mebd that the *OED* describes as being part of various '(ultimately unconvincing) suggestions'. ('mab', *OED.com,* <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/111737?rskey= gnmd67&result=1#eid> [accessed 12 December 2014]).

storicity. Gaiman is, in essence, using fantasy – its tropes, expectations, traditions, structures and elements – to both say things about those very elements and how they are developed and interpreted in fantasy, as well as tell stories about stories. More importantly, he is also demonstrating how the genre of fantasy has evolved into an even more metafictional iteration where, by revealing the fabrication of its fundamental features, it is then freed to explore how and why fantasy narratives are constructed in the first place.

Transformations of Genre

In his essay 'Transformations of Genre', Alastair Fowler posits that genres change 'when new topics are added to their repertoires', which is similar, but the reverse, of Tynyanov's constructive principle where the constructive factor and the material remain the same while the approach (the constructive principle) changes.[43] In the case of fantasy and metafantasy the changes fall somewhere in between, or rather operate according to a mix of both ideas. In fact, it is precisely because the changes that metafantasy enacts upon the genre occur at the structural level, i.e. through its metafictive doubling of story and fantasy story, that metafantasy is then capable of either subverting the genre's features by calling attention or transforming them but still possessing them, or divorcing (or diverging) itself from them entirely. While many topical changes have occurred in the genre, such as the addition of heroic/epic, urban, or gothic narratives, and these naturally possess their own deconstructive metafictive commentary on the genre or on their constituent parts (unless they have become automatized), with metafantasy it is not so much that 'new topics' are

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[43] Alastair Fowler, 'Transformations of Genre' in *Modern Genre Theory*, pp. 232-249 (p. 233).

added, but that the current topics are analysed, theorised upon, deconstructed and subverted. For example, as seen in the previous chapter, specially through Gaiman's fantasy retellings, a story like 'Snow, Glass, Apples' is not metafantastical because elements of the gothic, or gore, or dark fantasy have been introduced to the story of Snow White but because the purpose for their addition is to comment on the story itself – on Snow White's supernatural youth and beauty, on the prince's strange actions, on the queen's stereotyped evilness. It is the addition of these elements that reveals the commentary impetus, but it is the latter that entails the metafantastical act.

Conversely, new topics in fantasy can lead to new tangential genres and subgenres, any which could theoretically grow to supplant the 'royal' genre. New metafictive topics, such as the addition of concepts like conscious narrative causality, or fantasies about fantasy stories, as in Diana Wynne Jones' *Dark Lord of Derkholm* or Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*, impart metafantastic readings and commentary on the genre, and, if this is considered as a type of genre change, then metafantasy of this sort would have to be called an evolved form of fantasy. On the other hand, if instead of topic changes, the new additions occur in the structures and approaches to the features (e.g. a satirical approach to the features of the genre), then either the changes cause metafantasy to become another genre altogether (because it no longer operates according to the same fundaments as it did before), or it is not a genre at all. This latter idea will be explored at the end of this chapter, while the former will be addressed in the second half of this chapter.

Furthermore, when seen from a modal perspective, considering fantasy as a literary mode (see Attebery's essay 'Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula'), and metafiction as a narrative mode, then this critical transformation becomes, as Fowler suggests, 'modal', meaning that the 'innovation may also lie in a fresh approach to existing topics' (a fresh approach to what is said about existing topics as well as an acknowledgement about how certain topics have been approached) as seen in, for example, *American Gods* or *Neverwhere*, in which existing topics such as mythology and fairytales are freshly approached by being so openly examined (see the genre-aware section in Chapter Three).[44] In other words, though new topics may arise and become integrated through metafantasy, metafantasy's ultimate transformation of fantasy, if it is to be considered a genre, comes through its modal changes, i.e., though changing the way in which the narrative says something, as well as changing the focus of what is being said. Where fantasy stories say that 'realist' stories about the objectively unreal can be told, metafantasy stories say fantasy stories can be told, stories can be made with fantasy, and stories can be made about fantasy even when they are not fantasy. As previously outlined, this is what Fowler terms a 'counterstatement' – a 'producing [of] an epigrammatic transformation of the [genre]' – in other words, an antithetical transformation.[45]

Fantasy is a form whose structural purpose is to say something about the fantastic while being fantastic. Metafiction's purpose is to say something about the structure of storytelling (about fiction) while storytelling, hence, as stated above, fantasy's metafictiveness. Metafantasy, then, comments on the structure of storytelling narratives that comment upon the fantastic (a meta-metafiction). Through the

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[44] Fowler, p. 234.
[45] Fowler, p. 234.

awareness of this additional means by which it comment s and reflects on a form whose purpose is reflexive itself, metafantasy's practical purpose is to tell a story which can be fantastic or otherwise, as long as it is theorising about or commenting on the act of using the fantastic to tell stories with. Because metafantasy's capacity is to tell stories that theorise about this metafictional form, and not necessarily about fantasy as the form but the genre (or even mode), it does not always have to be fantasy in and of itself. This will be explored in depth in the second section of this chapter through a brief example of Gaiman's 'Murder Mysteries' – a story of nesting-tales where only the inner story is explicitly fantastic – which comments on fantasy while employing fantasy tropes and structures without necessarily being fantasy itself.

Fowler does not term it 'genre evolution', instead suggesting several ways through which genres change: combination (where the repertoires of two of more genres are combined), aggregation ('whereby several complete short works are grouped in an ordered collection'), change of scale (either a magnifying or diminishing focus on a topic), change of function, counterstatement, inclusion, and genre mixture. Some of these can be further grouped according to the genre possibilities they offer through the application of their particular changes, particularly 'combination' and 'genre mixture', which can in turn be likened to the metafantastic dynamics of fantasy pastiche and retelling. 'Aggregation', when applied to fantasy, suggests a paratextual approach (perhaps even parafantastical), in the sense that by the conscious act of selecting specific individual works and placing them within a collection, a commonality is implied – either that the collection falls within a

specific genre or mode, or that it does not and is thereby something new. Either perspective, however, still passes judgement and commentary on the genre.

Consider for example *Conjunctions: 39*'s proposed category of the 'new wave fabulist' which comments on the genre of fantasy by suggesting that here is something different by contrast: 'a small group of innovative writers rooted in the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror [that] have been simultaneously exploring and erasing the boundaries of those genres by creating fiction of remarkable depth and power'.[46] In fact, in the introduction to the collection, Peter Straub purposefully avoids making evolutionary genre remarks, calling new wave fabulation a 'kind of posttransformation [fiction]' that '[owes] more than half of [its] DNA and much of [its] underlying musculature to [its] original genre sources'.[47] Another example of this change through aggregation is how Gaiman's short story collections grant a wider or more pronounced sense of fantasy and the fantastic to the stories contained in them than they might otherwise individually, critically, possess. This paratextual analysis, nonetheless, while metafictive in its own right, is tangential to the hyper/intertextual focus employed here. 'Change of scale' and 'counterstatement' will be applied ahead.

Change of Function

Neil Gaiman's 'The Daughter of Owls' ('Daughter'), a purposeful transtextually referential pastiche in the style of seventeenth-century historian John Aubrey, is

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[46] Bradford Morrow, Peter Constantine and William Weaver, eds., *Rejoicing Revoicing,* Conjunctions Series, 38 (New York: Bard College, 2002), p. 2.

[47] Peter Straub, ed. 'Introduction', in *The New Wave Fabulists*, ed. by Peter Straub and Bradford Morrow, Conjunctions Series, 39 (New York: Bard College, 2002) p. 6.

useful in illustrating Fowler's genre transformation through changes in function. For Fowler, this type of transformation can occur in terms of topics, structure or style usage (the function they fulfil within the genre), a transformation that parallels metafantasy's often diametric interests in and response to fantasy's fundamental features. In 'Daughter of Owls', this change of function can be observed to occur in the relationship between, first, fantasy's taproots and Aubrey, second between Aubrey and fantasy, and third, between 'The Daughter of Owls', fantasy, the taproots, and Aubrey.

In his introduction to the *Smoke and Mirrors* collection, Gaiman describes Aubrey's writings as a 'potent mixture of credulity and erudition, of anecdote, reminiscence and conjecture' that gives its readers 'an immediate sense of a real person talking from the past in a way that transcends the centuries', but the style and subject of 'Daughter' does not so much reflect Aubrey's writings as it reflects the common notion of what his writings were about, their influence on the genre, and Gaiman's own love for storytelling.[48] Both the metafictiveness of fantasy as well as metafantasy itself can be seen in the differences between Aubrey's purpose and intention for collecting the various legends and fables in his works, and Gaiman's purpose for creating stories in the style of Aubrey. This difference is not merely found in the intentional hypertextual references to the historian – in the story being attributed to Aubrey – but in the approach and response to the fantastic.

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[48] Neil Gaiman, *Smoke and Mirrors* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 23.

For Gaiman, fantasy is a means through which Story is produced, and Story is, for him, one of the most accurate ways of understanding the world.[49] For Aubrey, however, fables and superstitions were historical curiosities of older times. In the preface to *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme* , the book Gaiman references in 'Daughter', Aubrey calls the contents of his book 'old customs, and old wives-fables' as well as 'grosse things' that 'ought to be quite rejected' though they may contain 'some truth and usefulnesse', acquiescing that ''tis a pleasure to consider the Errours that enveloped former ages'.[50] Aubrey further compares Britain with France, praising the latter where 'much of the fulsome Superstition and Ceremonies were left off' thanks to the Jesuits who 'omit' these superstitions for 'being ridiculous and giving scandall'.[51] It is clear from the pseudo-critical ('natural philosopher') approach Aubrey takes to collecting the historical influences and changes to these tales and customs (such as the transformation of pagan rituals to Christian festivals) that Aubrey's purpose for compiling these tales is not the same as Gaiman's.

In the introduction to *Three Prose Works*, the 1972 edition that contains *Remaines*, John Buchanan-Brown elaborates on Aubrey's intentions and methods in compiling fables and superstitions both in *Remaines* and in *Miscellanies* (1696). These, the latter in particular, established Aubrey's reputation as a 'credulous' and 'superstitious' person (a reputation Gaiman seems to maintain), though as can be easily noted from the scholarly style, language and composition of the work, as

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[49] See Gaiman's 'Reflections on Myth', *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, 31 (1999), pp. 75-84; 'The Mapmaker', in *Fragile Things*, by Neil Gaiman (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), pp. xix-xxii; or *American Gods* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 545.

[50] John Aubrey, 'Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme', in *Three Prose Works*, ed. by John Buchanan-Brown (London: Centaur Press, 1972), p. 132. It was originally written between 1687-89, but was not published, along with several of his other manuscripts, until 1881 by James Britten, which Buchanan-Brown describes a 'very mangled edition'.

[51] Aubrey, p. 132.

Buchanan-Brown argues, the purpose of the collections is not to encourage superstitious belief or to offer proof of supernatural phenomena, but to open up 'scientific' debate about that Aubrey called 'Hermetick Philosophy', i.e. 'occult science' as he felt it had been neglected by natural Philosophy – a subject he had been most interested in.[52] His reputation for credulity is a product of being too zealous and inclusive in his collecting but not explicitly discerning enough. The sceptical sentiment is still present throughout, but it is vague enough to have garnered Aubrey criticism in later periods of the Enlightenment.

In any case, like other anthologists interested in tracing and cataloguing marvellous and supernatural accounts and fables, Aubrey's overall intention is merely that – compiling for posterity instead of their intrinsic narrative value.[53] This distinction is important in identifying how the genre of fantasy can be said to have evolved into a more metafictive form, that is, in identifying how the elements that compose the genre are employed in such a self-aware/intertextual manner as to offer commentary or subversion of both those elements and their usage in fantasy.

It should be considered, for instance, how Gaiman imitates what would be expected to be Aubrey's language, though with neither the same style nor aim. 'Daughter' is chiefly a story, narratively possessing a plot, characters, setting and themes, while Aubrey's entries, on the other hand, are almost encyclopaedic in style, lacking all narrative or storytelling devices. Indeed, the word 'story' only appears five times in *Remaines*, with three of those taking place in the section on St. George and the

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[52] *Oxford English Dictionary*, entry for 'hermetic', < http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86262> [accessed 17 November 2014].

[53] Compare to the compilations by the Grimm's or Perrault that are not for the purpose of objective cataloguing but for the pleasure of the stories themselves.

Dragon, – a 'story' that Aubrey approaches with more scepticism than that granted to some of the other accounts in *Remaines*, citing Daniel Featley's assertion of the story as 'fabulous' because 'there was never any such man'.[54] Aubrey goes on to comment that while there did exist a George of Cappadocia (and he mentions Peter Heylin ('Heylyn')'s book on the subject), he doubts the validity of the mythologized story.[55] 'Story' is also used in describing old wives tales, lending support to the argument that, for Aubrey, a story is an account opposed to history and can therefore be more easily dismissed, whereas for Gaiman this distinction is never a problem for it is in its ties to history yet simultaneous falsehood that stories have value.

Similarly, if conversely, Gaiman lacks additional elements from Aubrey, such as the use of quotes from Virgil, Homer, Ovid, and Chaucer (often in Latin and Greek) to support the historical tracings of the customs or fables he presents. Aubrey's entry on the 'Warwolfe', for instance, consists of quotes in Latin from *Metamorphosis* (Lycaon becoming a wolf) and the *Eglogues* (Moeris taking herbs to turn himself into a wolf), an explanation of the French 'garloup', and a short account from a man Aubrey met while in Hospital, who said he'd been bitten by one.[56] In other words, Aubrey's intention is to give examples of historical and first-hand accounts/ encounters with the supernatural, while Gaiman's is to tell stories with and about the supernatural. In addition, Gaiman's pastiche has parody elements to it such as the introduction by the fictionalised Aubrey: 'I had this story from my friend Edmund

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[54] Aubrey, p. 156. The other two uses are equally derisive, the first in relation to 'the Holy Mawl', where Aubrey states 'This old story […] was no doubt derived from the aforesaid histories: but disguised (after the old fashion) with the Romancy-way' (p. 154), and the second in relation to a story about 'Stagge Hornes', told to Aubrey by Mr. Lancelot Moorehouse (p. 198).
[55] Aubrey, pp. 156-7.
[56] Aubrey, pp. 226-227.

Wyld Esq. who had it from Mr Farringdon, who said it was old in his time'.[57] The

exaggeration of Aubrey's testimonial style reveals the influence of the twice-told

tale trope found in many modern fantasies, thereby constituting a double reference.

As Clute explains in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, the twice-told tale:

> [characterises] a FANTASY whose telling incorporates a clear *re*telling of
> the inherent STORY – very often of a FAIRYTALE or FOLKLORE or
> MYTH or LEGEND – *foregrounding* the existence of a previous version of
> the tale now being retold.[58]

'Daughter' is disguised, as it were, as a retelling (in its referencing of Aubrey), and

constitutes one in the inner-consistency of the narrative, as exemplified by its

opening lines. However, it is not a true retelling of any previous story (as with

'Snow, Glass, Apples, and 'The Case of Twenty Blackbirds'), but a pastiche. Unlike

his parodic Lovecraftian pastiches, however, which purport to exist in the Mythos'

universe but are in truth reacting to the pastiching and cult-fandom tradition of

Lovecraft, 'Daughter', like a twice-told tale, 'foregrounds' the existence of Aubrey,

not as a previous version, but as the source of the tale now being told, but it is a false

foregrounding. Therein lies the change of function distanced from both Aubrey and

modern fantasy. For Aubrey, who collects these stories as curiosities of those

'errours' of former ages, their function is as fact, not in the sense that ghosts,

haunted houses, fairies and magic exist, but in the sense that they exist as customs

and beliefs of his contemporary culture. For modern fantasy, however, the historicity

of these fantastic elements is less important than their presence in the cultural

unconscious, meaning the general awareness of magic, fairies or werewolves is

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[57] Gaiman, 'Daughter of Owls', in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 144-146 (p. 145).
[58] Clute, 'Twice-Told', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 968.

more important to the generation of fantasy narratives than tracing and identifying historic sources that mention these elements.

In fact, even if a source is mentioned in the story, the purpose of mentioning them is to establish a validity for the inner-consistency belief and acceptance of the fantastic elements within the narrative and an antiqueness or ancientness to them, as opposed to identifying a point of their 'creation' or origination as myths, folktales, or superstitions. For instance, when Anodos reads 'many wondrous tales of Fairy Land, and olden times, and the Knights of King Arthur's table' while in the little house in the forest on the outskirts of Fairy Land, the tales reinforce the ancient truth of his strange experiences; MacDonald situates his character and story within the taproots of fantasy. Gaiman's usage of Aubrey in 'Daughter' works on a similar basis, where the referencing of Aubrey serves to foment an air of 'oldness' and fantastic possibility, except that Aubrey's intention was never to support these superstitions or to story-tell. Thus, instead of creating a story that has Aubrey's *Remaines* as its intertext, Gaiman creates a story that foregrounds the existence of Aubrey and his (anachronistic) storytelling. Gaiman's Aubrey is then both mythic and historic, true and false, and more story than reality; he is constructed of the storyness that is modern fantasy.

This shows the metafiction that metafantasy enacts upon fantasy (making it a meta-metanarrative), whereby the function the taproots possess in shaping fantasy from which (and with which) fantasy stories can be constructed is changed to one where the taproots, as well as the genre, are used to deconstruct that previous usage. Metafantasy offers explorations into the function of fantasy and its components,

therefore the way in which it employs those components is not to construct, but to deconstruct, reflect, and acknowledge, even as it creates new fictions. Here, Gaiman explores what kind of story can be told using the once non-fantastic but fantasy-influencing pre-text of Aubrey's entries in order to tell a story that looks like what might as well be an Aubrey story – the reader likely will not know it is not an Aubrey-like story, though they will know it is a Gaiman story masquerading as an Aubrey story.

Gaiman's story demonstrates the functional change of taproot fables into modern genre and beyond, as its metafantasy structures can only be a product of knowingness (even an unintentional knowingness) of fantasy and its components. If fantasy is 'a way to tell stories about the fantastic', and the fantastic is made up of taproots whose purpose was not fundamentally to be stories (because they explained something from the natural world, imparted morals or lessons, or were regarded as curiosities of bygone times), then the genre of fantasy, in large part, encompasses a change in function.[59] What Gaiman's story is actually doing, then, is establishing a web of connectors that unite, counter-chronologically, a specific period with specific perceptions of those taproots to those very taproots, as though casting a line or a net backwards through time. At the same time, Gaiman's story is firmly indebted to modern fantasy; it cannot escape from the impetus to tell of stories about the fantastic even if it also draws attention to that constructive process, which in turn changes again the function of those elements. Through this, the story is as grounded in the present of the genre as to its past. 'The Daughter of Owls' does not merely utilise and transform these taproots via fantasy ('Snow, Glass, Apples' generally

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[59] Clute, 'Fantasy', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, pp. 337-339 (p. 338).

does), but points to the change in function between taproot-to-fantasy. In pointing to this change, the story succeeds in revealing, from a basic standpoint, the function of fantasy: of storytelling with the fantastic. 'Daughter', then, is a story about storytelling: a fantasy about fantasy, its history and mode of operation.

Section 3: Toward a non-Evolutionary Approach

Like most of Fowler's transformations that possess close similarities between each other, change of function is closely related to the change of scale transformation, in that both reflect a change in the manner in which a certain topic or structure is developed and focused on. It is not merely, as suggested before, a matter of additions to a genre's repertoire, or of focusing more on specific elements so as to magnify them necessarily, but of more radical changes to the purpose and intention of the genre and the way those are manifested. As with Opacki's royal genres, changes in function can be considered as occurring in alternating patterns, where an acknowledged primary and prominent feature (or in this case, function) gives way to a secondary one, which then becomes the primary, although this, as with Tynyanov's genre evolution according to constructive principles, tends to imply a complete substitution instead of temporary or partial fluctuations.

On the other hand, the possibility of changes in function opens up the possibility for a wider variety of interpretations both fantastic and metafantastic, instead of a one-to-one transformation. Moreover, and as will be seen in particular with the change of scale transformation, it opens up the possibility for the emerging genre, if it is to be called such, to not have to be classified as the same genre. In other words, if as seen,

metafantasy can utilise fantasy elements for different purposes and functions than those traditionally observed in the genre, that is, to create narratives that examine or invite examinations of the genre as a whole, then it is open to being something other than fantasy. It is then not a matter of 'evolution' in the sense that it is entirely natural – a sentiment David Duff echoes: 'genres are [not] autonomous entities [but rather] culturally constructed categories' – but genre transformation, in the sense that it is purposeful, intentional, deliberate and artificial (constructed), 'determined by individual agency [and] creative will'.[60]

Metafantasy as Counter-Genre to Fantasy

An evolutionary approach to the relationship between metafantasy and fantasy, as seen, has not been entirely successful in accounting for all the facets of metafantasy, nor, more importantly, accounted for the continuing existence and production of narratives that belong to the genre of fantasy and are not metafantastic. The problem in this approach lies in the assumption that because metafantasy responds to fantasy, it must not only emerge from it but must be transforming its assumed automatized state into a newer form.

While genre theorists make it clear that genre evolution is not entirely analogous to Darwinian evolution, and critics like Duff point out that literary genre evolution is as much a 'revolutionary' model as an evolutionary one given that 'genres "evolve" because the act of belonging to a genre involves both adoption of and resistance to its conventions', it is this notion of 'belonging' that does not accurately reflect all

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[60] David Duff, ed., 'Introduction', *Modern Genre Theory*, p. 4.

the subversive and deconstructive aspects of metafantasy.[61] Genres evolve, or rather
are seen to evolve, when they become distinct yet sufficient features are preserved
that they are still identifiable as pertaining to whichever given genre.[62] Yet, as seen,
genre recognition (through the manipulation of genre expectation) is precisely
metafantasy's primary goal, effected through the modification, transformation and
calling of attention to what readers consider to be those sufficient characteristics
and/or fundamental features. For instance, magic in George R.R. Martin's seeming
high fantasy is limited and often trivialized by the narrative in *A Song of Ice and
Fire*; archetypal characters like the hero and the villain are subverted in Diana
Wynne Jones' titular Derk in *The Dark Lord of Derkholm*; the symbiotic
relationship between a fantasy tale and its readers is directly addressed in Ende's
nesting-structured story of Fantastika in *The NeverEnding Story*; a leper writer
denies the input of his senses because he knows about fantasy and how it operates in
Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*; and three famous fantasy authors
are recruited by Wells to protect the physical lands of fantasy and imagination in
James A. Owens' *The Chronicles of the Imaginarium Geographica*. Metafantasy can
only achieve this if it is placed in an antithetical position to fantasy. Its meta-status
of existing beyond or outside of fantasy grants it the capacity to reflect, but also
exploit and cannibalize the genre, which it cannot do if it also belongs to the genre,
or is positioned as being part of/within it.

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[61] Duff, pp. 7-8.
[62] Tynyanov, p. 31.

Fowler's Counter-Genre

Just as fantasy 'recombines and inverts the real, but […] does not escape it [existing, instead,] in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to [it]' and cannot be said to have 'evolved' from either the real or realist fiction because neither has exhausted their possibilities, so metafantasy can be said to exist in a contrary relation to fantasy.[63] Thus, in treating modern fantasy as a taproot, metafantasy is joined to but distinct (as genre, form and/or mode) from fantasy. Thus, metafantasy is not the progressive transformation of the genre of fantasy, but in responding to it as fiction would a taproot, it irrevocably changes, or at least modifies, the perceptions of that taproot. Though fantasy is not, as Tynyanov or Opacki posit of genre evolution, changed so as to encompass those features brought about by a metafictive response to the genre, it is nonetheless affected by what those metafictive narratives of fantasy say about it – by the transformative reflections, narrative and literary awareness, subversions and other insights into the genre.

Alistair Fowler, as well as other theorists, call this type of relationship a 'counter-genre', which Duff defines as 'a genre or subgenre that develops in implicit or explicit opposition to an existing genre', based on Claudio Guillén's argument regarding works he described as being 'diametrically opposed' to specific genres.[64] Fowler includes the counter-genre as one of his forms of genre transformation, positing that 'new genres' and 'antigenres' could be regarded as being 'antitheses to existing genres' because 'their repertoires are in contrast' to previous genres. Unlike Tynyanov's constructive principle for genre evolution, where certain features from a

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[63] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 20.
[64] Duff, p. xi.

genre rise in opposition '*spread*[ing] *over as wide an area as possible*' in an 'urge to take over the widest area, in any sector', and unlike Opacki's alternating hierarchies of genre where a secondary genre alternates and overpowers a primary one, for Fowler, the counter-genre 'is not directed against a particular original' and as such 'it has a life of its own that continues collaterally with the contrasting genre'.[65]

In other words, as long as no automatization has occurred in the primary genre, it can continue to coexist in parallel with a counter-genre. Whatever is considered the primary genre, fantasy in this case, is also free to continue evolving irrespective of any counter-genres that arise. More importantly, the counter-genre is not tied to the original as though it was an extension or progression of it, but as a response. An apt analogy is again that of the mirror that while unconnected to the object it reflects, is nonetheless tied to it in that it reflects it. Applied to fantasy and metafantasy then, the implication that surfaces is that the latter is not fantasy, but that it is irrevocably connected to it as long as it reflects and responds to it.

In other words, metafantasy can be fantasy by reflecting it, but it does not have to be. What it does have to be is connected to the genre by responding to it as a literary form, in the manners discussed. This is because, like a mirror, metafantasy is able to reflect the genre as a whole from an outside perspective, as well as add non-fantasy devices, characteristics and elements that surround the genre but are not necessarily a part of it, the same as a mirror reflects the surroundings of the object before it. This gives rise to narratives that can eschew fundamental features of fantasy, its impossibility for instance, in favour of focusing on other apparent features, such as

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[65] Fowler, p. 238.

its tropes, archetypes, and the very structure of storytelling itself, as observed particularly with fabulists like Gaiman.

Fantasy's inherent operating metafiction – the necessary acceptance of the impossible and simultaneous awareness of impossibility inherent in the genre's storytelling structure – can then be bared through metafantasy, as is its status as a metatext (thus allowing narratives like Gaiman's *American Gods*, *Sandman*, or *Neverwhere*, Valente's *Fairyland* series, or Owen's *Chronicles* to combine fantasies and fantasy's taproots regardless of their origins, precisely because they are all already present in the overall fantasy-genre metatext, or for narratives like Pratchett's *Discworld* to reflectively pastiche the artifice of the fantasy metatext itself). If fantasy is a tree whose trunk represents the core of the genre, with its roots grounded on its pre-texts, and its branches extending outward into countless narratives and iterations, metafantasy is like a grafted tree whose roots are embedded in the genre, but which is a different species to the core one.

Metafantasy and Fantasy

The question that arises from the separation of fantasy and metafantasy as two distinct forms becomes whether or not metafantasy can continue to be fantasy. The answer, as shown in the examples used throughout Chapter Two and Three and as suggested above, is yes, as those works of parody, pastiche, retelling and genre-awareness analysed in the chapter, as well as those explored up to this point in this chapter are fantasy as well as metafantasy because they fulfil the requirements of both forms. Fowler posits that genres and antigenres can be combined into a single

work. It is important to note that Fowler's use of genre is more in the terms of format, i.e., the genres of the novel, the poem or the travel journal, accounting for how the genre of the novel was transformed at points throughout its history not only by additions but by entirely antithetical genres (the anti-novel). Thus, counter-genres to the novel, for example, could coexist simultaneously with the novel (of whichever given period), adding to the variety of how the novel is regarded and classified. In the case of fantasy and metafantasy, it must be remembered that they are genres (or modes) of fiction, rising in opposition, revolution, subversion or response to it, but pertaining to fiction nonetheless. Because fantasy is a metafictive genre, metafantasy is a meta-metafictive genre about fantasy, meaning it responds metafictively to a specific metafictive genre.

Silencing

Acknowledging fantasy and metafantasy to be two distinct forms, in the same way that taproots are distinct from the forms that use them, also explains the selective process undertaken by both authors and readers in interacting with what are considered to be the elements and characteristics of those taproots. Because they are not the same, even though one is dependent on the pre-existence of the other, the narratives and by extension the creators and receptors of the narratives, are not bound to the rules and limitations of those pre-texts. Fowler's change of function already suggested this difference, but viewed as a counter-genre it can be concluded that narratives that employ metafantasy (or are metafantastically constructed) to reflect aspects, tropes, or specific fantasy elements, can be imprecise or detailed, accurate or inaccurate, in their responses. Consider once again Gaiman's 'Daughter

of Owls', where a fictionalized Aubrey is attributed a certain voice, tone, and manner of writing distinctly different from actual reality. Structurally this does not matter because a metafantasy narrative (same as a fantasy narrative in relation to its taproots) utilises the entirety of the fantasy metatext (the assumptions made about fantasy, in particular) to retrospectively create an Aubrey who writes fantastic accounts of seventeenth century life because stories from Fantasyland dictate he do so.

Lloyd Alexander's mute-warrior reading of the cauldron of story metaphor complements this distinction between taproot and genre (and on a smaller scale, text). As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Alexander combines the image of the cauldron of story, where all the archetypal taproots of fantasy and story reside, with that of the Black Cauldron from the Mabinogion and his *Chronicles of Prydain*. The regenerating (recursive) power of the cauldron of story means stories, characters and themes can be brought back to life again and again, but that each time their original voice is muted more and more in favour of new purposes. The re-risen cauldron-born are only an image (much like a mirror's reflection) that is entirely true to its original yet simultaneously entirely removed from it – partly stripped of its essence and put to different use as its master sees fit.

When applied to the texts discussed throughout chapters three and four, it explains why, for instance, Gaiman's 'Shoggoth's Old Peculiar' purposefully reflects Lovecraft and Lovecraftian pastiches, but also silences them in order to put them to a different purpose: one that revels in the tradition of pastiching and fannishly interacting with the transtext that is Lovecraft's fiction. Similarly, the voice of the

original Grimm fairytales is muted in favour of Gaiman's 'Snow, Glass, Apples', or the historic and local voices of the original Bluebeard (from Gilles-de-Rais and Conomor, to the fairytale versions by Halliwell and Perrault) are silenced for the sake of fairytale inversion in 'The White Road', openly revealing fantasy's retelling tradition and structures. Even a character like Lucifer in *The Sandman* is dependent on his blatant Miltonian intertextual connection while simultaneously denied that character's voice in favour of Gaiman's voice – a voice concerned with storytelling (as seen when Lucifer says 'I had the hubris originally to regard myself as a collaborator, as a co-author… Very rapidly I found myself reduced to the status of character, following something of a disagreement in the fundamental direction of the creation.').[66] Such is the way with recursiveness, so that the metafictive approach to texts results in necessary echoing without echo, or rather, not a naturally produced reverberation, but one intentionally fabricated for the purpose of the composition.

Fantasy's own metafictive treatment of its taproots reflects this, as it is one of simultaneous estrangement and familiarization; similarly, if conversely, metafantasy's self-aware response to fantasy gives voice to the genre (its metatext) by making it seem familiar and recognizable, and silences it, by making it estranging or noncompliant with the original. The fairies and other creatures in Tad Williams' *War of the Flowers*, for instance, are familiar to both the main character, Theo, and the fantasy reader, and Theo himself points it out, but the setting and characterizations of the fantasy beings do not correspond to traditional genre expectations, being thus estranging (not of reality, but of the genre). This means then that metafantasy is free to respond to fantasy, but not obligated to be fantasy.

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[66] Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*, The Sandman Series, 69 (New York: Vertigo, 1995), p. 16.

Section 4: The Spectrum of Non-Fantasy Metafantasy

As briefly suggested, in being a form (mode, genre, or style) that is separate from fantasy, metafantasy can react to fantasy in much freer ways outside of the fundamental restraints that the genre imposes. This is in large part because, in responding to the genre as an object, and in using it as a deconstructive/ reconstructive tool, the fundamental features that metafantasy is able to exploit are the storytelling structures and archetypes of the genre itself. While Chapters Two and Three explored how metafantasy constitutes a metafictive response to an already metafictive genre, and in which ways it can manifest this metafictionality, it is equally important to note how far this metafictive response can be taken, that is, how metafantasy addresses the question regarding what constitutes the genre of fantasy, how it is constructed and how it is read, because it demonstrates how metafantasy must be recognized as distinct from fantasy.

This separation can be most appreciated in narratives that actively subvert the traditional (or recognizable) ways in which the genre is told, specifically in three areas: metafantasies that tell fantasies but construct them non-fantastically, in other words, that call into question what the reader considers fantastic by subverting the language of fantasy; metafantasies that tell non-fantasies fantastically, i.e., that draw attention to the usage of language and tropes in fantasy; and metafantasies that though transtextually linked to the genre though referencing, language or style, neither offer a definitive escape from Todorov's hesitation state nor a definitive 'impossibility' or 'subversion' of reality, meaning that their classification as fantasy or non-fantasy is purposefully left to the reader and is dependent on their previous

experiences, not in order to decode the text (as occurs with metafantasy pastiches, parodies and retellings), but merely in influencing their own response.

I - Fantasy told as non-fantasy

Gaiman's 'Chivalry' was discussed in Chapter Three as an example of metafantasy through fantasy-aware characters. Mrs. Whitaker's genre-savviness grants her a metafictive level of knowledge about the events unfolding than that possessed by the other characters in the story, even (or especially) Galaad. As addressed in Chapter Three, a fantasy reader's experience will enable them to possess similar genre awareness, thereby responding to the text as though it was fantasy. It must be noted, however, that though the narrative is rife with references to fantasy tropes, objects and stories, it is told in a style that minimalizes the fantastic and makes it appears mundane. The discovery of the Grail is not treated as a momentous occasion ('it was under a fur coat'), the cup is not described ostentatiously as an awe-inspiring artefact ('the Holy Grail … had a little round paper sticker on the base, and written on it, in felt pen, was the price: 30p'), and when Mrs Whitaker polishes it, it is merely described as gleaming (no gleaming unearthly or thrumming with unrestrained power, or any other fantasy-like clichés).[67]

The closest the narrative comes to utilising fantastic language is when Mrs. Whitaker tastes the juice of the golden apple and 'the kitchen [becomes] filled – almost imperceptibly, magically – with the smell of summer fruit, of raspberries and peaches and strawberries and red currants' and 'as if from a great way away [Mrs.

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[67] Gaiman, 'Chivalry', in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 35-49 (p. 36).

Whitaker hears] distant voices raised in song and far music on the air'.[68] While Galaad's language is decidedly fantastic, Mrs Whitaker's mundanity makes his archaic style appear naïve by comparison. Galaad's language is more akin to a fantasy reader's expectation of language in a fantasy story about knights and holy quests, and Mrs Whitaker's behaviour bares and shatters this expectation.

Gaiman's 'Chivalry' is told as though knights, Grails and quests were the most commonplace things in the world, not worthy of note especially if one is familiar with the way such things traditionally play out, as Mrs Whitaker is. And yet the fantasy of 'Chivalry' does not collapse. In fact, if it were considered to not be fantasy the story would collapse because it would not make sense for human beings to act this way – they would all have to be mad. Mrs Whitaker's knowingness (she informs her neighbour that the cup is the Holy Grail, for example) is only sustainable if the cup is the Holy Grail. Galaad's appearance (armour and white steed) would not make sense otherwise either. But it is in opening up the possibility that the story might not be fantastic, by employing non-fantastic language, that Gaiman succeeds in pointing out to the reader and making them realise just how much genre-awareness they themselves possess and how much their expectations dictate the way in which they read fantasy.

Gaiman is, as Sandor Klapcsik argues, twining the mundane and the miraculous, though this does not, as Mendlesohn has suggested and as addressed in Chapter

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[68]Gaiman, p. 46. Note, when Mrs Whitaker picks up the Philosopher's Stone she feels 'stillness and a sort of peace' and serenity, and from the Egg of the Phoenix her impression is described as 'one of incredible heat and freedom', hearing 'the crackling of distant fires', feeling as though she was 'far above the world, swooping and diving on the wings of flame' (p. 45).

Three, necessarily produce a conflict in the reader.[69] In the case of fantasies told

mundanely, the metafantasy's intended ideal reader is naturally one familiar with the

genre – familiar with the genre's proclivity for knights, quests and magical objects, a

reading prompted by Mrs. Whitaker's nonchalant reactions.[70] Hers, however, are

one of only a few prompts Gaiman uses to instigate a fantasy reading, the second

being in the form of the named objects. By openly naming the Grail, the sword

Balmung, the Philosopher's Stone, the Egg of the Phoenix, and the apples of the

Hesperides, Gaiman's active referencing of Arthurian, medieval, alchemic, and

Greek mythology fantastic taproots suggests to the reader that they are engaging

with a fantasy narrative (because fantasies that employ these taproots reside in the

metatext mined by metafantasy), even if the language and style employed is

anything but fantastic. Indeed, the mundanity of 'Chivalry' – Mrs. Whitaker, the

suburban setting, the distinctly un-wondrous tone of the narrative full of tea,

crumpets, and Oxfam shops – can be paired with Gaiman's highly metafantastic

'Forbidden Brides' story, where he openly examines what makes a fantasy story

fantasy, and how an author writes mundanely.

The story is a blatant satire of fantasy writers, namely Gaiman himself, that

possesses at least three distinct metafictional levels. Like 'Murder Mysteries', which

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[69] Sandor Klapcsik, 'Neil Gaiman's Irony, Liminal Fantasies, and Fairy Tale Adaptations', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 14 (2008), 317-334 (p. 318). Note this is in reference to Gaiman's comments in the 'Foreword' to *Lud-in-the-Mist*. Liminality conflicts will be explored ahead when discussing cases of dubious fantasy where it is difficult or intentionally impossible to determine whether a narrative is fantasy or not, with the decision resting solely on the reader.
[70] Though it is recognized that a variety of readers, from the experienced fantasy reader to the non-fantasy reader can and do interact with both fantasy and metafantasy texts, it is also necessary to emphasize that highly self-conscious literature like metafantasy that reveals the constructedness of literature and appears to be aimed toward, or at least implies the presence and existence of, an experienced reader who can 'celebrate the visual and verbal constructions of story'. (Len Unswroth, 'Reading grammatically: Exploring the "constructedness" of literary texts', *L1 Educational Studies in Language and Literature*, 2(2002), 121-140 (p. 121).)

will be discussed ahead, 'Forbidden Brides' contains stories within stories, but instead of the framing narrative taking place in a primary world analogous to the actual world, here Gaiman not only depicts an immersive fantastic setting, he also reverses the perspective of what is fantasy in the first place. Told in exaggerated fantastic gothic style, the story centres on a writer in a gothic universe who longs to write realist fiction (gothic fiction, from his perspective) because 'life-as-it-is stuff' is 'real literature'. Where Mrs Whitaker's world is breached by the fantastic, the world of 'Forbidden Brides' is already fantastic, yet, like Mrs Whitaker, the reactions to the fantastic in the latter are nonchalant to the point of parodic absurdity. The nameless narrator is not disturbed or surprised by his talking pet raven or the numerous ghouls that haunt the grounds of his mansion. Moreover, what he regards as fantasy is what the reader would regard as the most mundane realist fiction. When, at the end of the story, he decides to write fantasy, this is what he writes:

> **Amelia Earnshawe placed the slices of wholewheat bread into the toaster and pushed it down. She set the timer to dark brown, just as George liked it. Amelia preferred her toast barely singed. She liked white bread as well, even if it didn't have the vitamins. She hadn't eaten white bread for a decade now.**

> **At the breakfast table, George read his paper. He did not look up. He never looked up.**

> ***I hate him,* she thought, and simply putting the emotion into words surprised her. She said it again in her head. *I hate him.* It was like a song. *I hate him for his toast, and for his bald head, and for the way he chases the office crumpet—girls barely out of school who laugh at him behind his back, and for the way he ignores me whenever he doesn't want***

> *to be bothered with me, and for the way he says "What, love?" when I ask*
>
> *him a simple question, as if he's long ago forgotten my name. As if he's*
>
> *forgotten that I even have a name.*[71]

As with 'Chivalry', it is the acceptance and demystification of the gothic and fantastic in general than produces the parodic aspect of the story, but where it is subtle in 'Chivalry', it is increased and pointed out by the narrator in 'Forbidden Brides'. The 'humor [that] creeps in' full of 'self-parody [that] whispers at the edges of things' is true as much for the narrator in his gothic world as for the reader in the actual world, be they fantasy readers or not. Amelia's story is constantly being interrupted by satirical moments, as when her guide is killed mid-sentence: '**"Fly for your life, fly for your immortal aagh." "My what?" she asked**'; or when, after encountering the ghouls that haunt her family, she promises the undead to bring them brides, and they respond '**and do you think we could get her to throw in a side order of those little bread roll things?"**'.[72] The writer's complaint, then, that he cannot write realist fiction takes on an additional level of satire from the perspective of the reader, as what is considered parodic for the character – humour sneaking into realist fiction – gains a doubled parody for the reader: humour sneaking into a gothic fantasy perceived as realist fiction by a gothic fantasy character who exists within a humorous gothic fantasy about storytelling.

Of course, more than parody, Gaiman's underlying argument concerns the validity of writing fantasy and what constitutes reading and writing fantasy generically-speaking, not just what is fantasy semantically-speaking. Both 'Chivalry' and

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[71] Gaiman, 'Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves in the Secret House of the Night of Dread Desire', in *Fragile Things*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 47-62 (p. 60). Note that bold is used in original to distinguish between two levels of story.
[72] Gaiman, 'Forbidden Brides', p. 52.

'Forbidden Brides' question the relationship between the fantastic and the mundane, one by refusing to reflect a wondrous story-telling language that would be expected from a story about knights and holy quests, and the other by inverting that which is called fantasy with reality and vice versa. In both, therefore, fantasy is rendered into a recognizable object that can be pointed to, revealing through inversions that there is an external fantasy reader doing the recognizing. As this recognizable form full of expectations and demands, the genre becomes not something that produces fantasy stories, but a tool with which to talk about and decode narratives about fantasy. With both stories, in utilizing non-fantasy styles to tell a fantasy story, or in revealing the act of telling fantasy stories by having the fantasy story call itself non-fantasy, Gaiman invites the reader to examine what they themselves consider to be fantasy, their limits, and the act of deciding what is fantasy itself. The genre is thus bared, as not only does the reader encounter a point of hesitation in the face of the impossible or a doubling of awareness through the genre's inherent metafictiveness, but a tripling – an acknowledgement of the fact that those processes occur when reading fantasy.

Metafantasy's counter-perspective to fantasy, which can only be carried out from a point outside of the genre, is precisely that fantasy narratives, from a reader's point of view, are not as dependent on the genre's fundamental characteristic of the impossible. By revealing this outsider's (this meta) viewpoint, metafantasy reveals the modern state of fantasy as a whole, where it is not merely what comes from within any specific fantasy narrative that determines what it is, but the external (intertextual intentions of the author and hypertextual responses and expectations of the reader) that carry the fantastic.

More subversive than fantasy that is told as though it was not fantasy, then, is non-fantasy that is told under the guise of fantasy tropes, styles and language. This kind of metafantasy makes the constructedness of the genre blatantly obvious, as in utilising certain recognizable elements, but not actually containing the fundamental feature of fantasy – its impossibility, it reveals how the genre has become recognizable as a whole, not merely on a narrative-to-narrative basis.[73] Such narratives point toward the cauldron of story – the fantasy metatext –more blatantly than fantasy told non-fantastically, because they suggest, be it blatantly or covertly, that fantasy has become a taproot that fiction can mine in order to produce new fictions. It acknowledges fantasy as a cultural storytelling mode, inviting the reader to adopt certain reading styles, particularly to recognize themselves as conscious fantasy readers.

II - Non-fantasy told as fantasy

Like fantasy told non-fantastically, non-fantasy (or often low-fantasy) told fantastically reveals how much of what a fantasy reader (and fantasy author) regard as fantasy is dependent on transtextual connections to other fantasies, their influencing perceptions, and almost Pavlovian-like responses.[74] For example, George R.R. Martin's first novel in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, *A Game of Thrones*, demonstrates how few truly fantastic elements are necessary in order to

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[73] Constructedness: 'The status of a text (in any medium) as something created, authored, composed, framed, mediated, and/or edited rather than being an unmediated slice of life or a window on the world.' (Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, *A Dictionary of Media and Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [Current Online Version: 2014]) [accessed December 11 2014]).

[74] What is meant by 'low-fantasy' here is in the amount of objectively impossible elements, not in the sense of the opposite to immersive 'high-fantasy'.

suggest and subsequently satisfy the expectation of fantasy.[75] Unlike Martin's novel, which while containing very slight and often questionable instances of truly impossible events is nevertheless fantasy thanks to its secondary world setting, Gaiman's 'Locks' is a perfect example of the usage of fantasy tropes, language and style in order to signal to a certain type of reading while containing nothing fantastic. 'Locks' is a poem originally published in 1999, in Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling's *Silver Birch, Blood Moon*, an anthology of modern retold fairy tales.[76] Told in free verse, the poem comprises a father's internal monologue as he reads the tale of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' to his daughter.

The poem establishes from the first line that it is indebted to stories and that its main subject is storytelling – 'We owe it to each other to tell stories' – a focus which can be said to take place across four levels: in the intended message which emphasizes the importance and inescapability of story as an abstract concept, in the subject which explores the transtextual history of the original Robert Southey tale, in the narrative content which entails the protagonist telling the story, and structurally in the fact that it is a story itself.[77] In addition to this quadrupled emphasis on story (specifically fairytale stories), Gaiman manages to instil a sense of fantastic wonder though the use of poetic language and form.

Gaiman exploits poetry's long association with fantasy, fairytales and the wondrous in general, delighting in how the beauty of language shapes images and promises of

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[75] See: Leimar García-Siino, 'Resembling Fantasy: Studying the Game of Awareness with George R. R. Martin's A Game of Thrones', *Hélice: Reflexiones Críticas Sobre Ficción Especulativa,* 15 (2012), 21-28.

[76] Gaiman, 'Locks', in *Silver Birch, Blood Moon*, ed. by Ellen Datlow and Terry Windling (New York: Avon Books, 1999), pp. 313-318.

[77] Gaiman, 'Locks', in *Fragile Things*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 169-171 (p. 169).

the fantastic without having to actually be fantasy.[78] The connection between magic

and spellcasting, as well as with ballads that narrate epic tales means that poetry

already carries fantastic connotations to the reader. Compare 'Locks' to some of

Gaiman's other fantasy poems, especially those that engage in recursive and

retelling narratives such as 'The Fairy Reel', 'Hidden Chamber', 'The White Road',

'Inventing Aladdin', or 'Instructions'. In 'The Fairy Reel' the speaker is an old man

of sixty who bemoans having split his soul in two, keeping half in the mortal world

and half in Fäerie instead of giving himself entirely to the magical world of fairy

lasses and ephemeral dances. Gaiman exploits the freedom and beauty of poetic

language by conjuring up images of lightning trees, burning brooks and dancing

until one crumbles into wheels of gold, all full of uncertainty and wondrous

impossibility, an act which calls to mind Tolkien's subcreative power in fantasy.[79]

Even more exploitative of poetry as a vehicle for fantasy is 'Instructions', a poem

that has been published independently, in anthologies and in collections since 1999,

and made into an book illustrated by Charles Vess in 2010. The poem is, as Gaiman

explains in the introduction to *Fragile Things*, a set of instructions for what to do if

one finds oneself in a fairy tale that include being careful not to eat fairy food and

knowing how to be courteous to or cautious of certain personages like old women,

wolves, and princesses in castles. Gaiman makes use of familiar but untraceable

fantasy and fairytale imagery, archetypes and tropes to weave a setting that is

unfamiliar and new enough to be original for the reader, but laden with the

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[78] Poetry's long standing influence on and usage in Fantasy can be traced back to the epic poem, medieval songs, Chaucer, Spencer, Shakespeare, fairytales with rhyming structures or rhyming morals such as Perrault's, and poets like Rossetti or Shelley, and seen throughout Tolkien's works, in particular, and his countless imitators. It features frequently in Gaiman's works, especially in the form of rhymes characters repeat like litanies of power right before facing their final conflict, as with Shadow or Richard Mayhew.

[79] Gaiman, 'The Fairy Reel', in *Fragile Things*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 27-28.

dreamlike/nostalgic quality they have come to expect from the genre and the form.

Like *Stardust*, of which Gaiman has said: '[it should] make you feel like you felt

when you were a kid reading a fairy tale, only this one's for you, and you're a

grown-up; […] it's a story you haven't heard before, but once it's done it should feel

like a story you're known all your life', 'Instructions' achieves this doubleness by

promising the fantastic – images, words, settings and possibilities.[80] Similarly, are

these lines in 'Locks':

> I remember, as I tell it, that the locks,
> of Southey's heroine had silvered with age.
> The Old Woman and the Three Bears…
> Perhaps they had been golden once,
>   when she was a child.[81]

and:
> "And if I could," my father wrote to me,
> huge as a bear himself, when I was younger,
> "I would dower you with experience,
>   without experience,"
> and I, in my turn, would pass that on to you.
> But we make our own mistakes. We sleep
> Unwisely.
> The repetition echoes down the years.
> When your children grow, when your
>   dark locks begin to silver,
> when you are an old woman,
>   alone with your three bears,
> what will you see? What stories will you tell?[82]

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[80] Nick Stechfield, 'Faerie Tales', *SFX*, 55 (1999), 56-58 (p. 58).
[81] Gaiman, 'Locks', p. 170.
[82] Gaiman, 'Locks', p. 171.

They are full of hesitating possibility (the speculation over the golden hair, the cyclicality of mistake, the wondering about future stories) intertwined with the fairytale elements of Southey's story (the silver/golden hair, the bears). Yet, unlike 'The Fairy Reel' or 'Instructions', in 'Locks', the promises of fantasy are not fulfilled. By combining elements of hesitation, fairytale and the mundane, Gaiman succeeds in granting the mundane an air of fantasy.[83] This combination is complete with the final lines wherein Gaiman's speaker confesses he has adopted habits based on a wiser, more wary Father Bear:

> These days my sympathy's with Father Bear.
> Before I leave my house I lock the door,
> and check each bed and chair on my return.
>
> Again.
>
> Again.
>
> Again.[84]

The speaker connects himself to the fairytale character, but is not magically transformed; the impossible wonder of the tale appears to have seeped into the actual world, but it really has not. By being told in a familiar storytelling (or fairytale-telling) format, the experienced fantasy reader is invited to relate to the child that is being told the story of the three bears – a state of ready acceptance of story and wonder – as much as they are invited to consider the inherent intertextuality of the modern version (the change from Southey's old woman to

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[83] This making of the mundane into the sublime and wondrous is, of course, a familiar trope in poetry. Consider, for example, Robert Frost's 'Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening'.
[84] Gaiman, 'Locks', p. 171.

Goldilocks) – and therefore fairytales (and by extension fantasy) – as the father

does.

In other words, their reactions to fantasy are as much brought on by their awareness

of intertextuality suggested by the text as by their past (often childhood) experiences

with the fantastic. In *The Sandman* series, Gaiman's Faerie is said to be 'governed

only by rules of etiquette, by formalities and modes of behaviour: in short, by

custom'.[85] Likewise, his other narratives about Faerie and Fantasy belie the rules

and customization of those elements regarded as being pertinent or analogous to

narratives about Faerie and Fantasy, and of the reader's relation to them. More than

Faerie having rules, it is fantasy projecting rules about Fantasyland – a dynamic

being metafictionally suggested by metafantasy. They invite the reader to situate

themselves not only within Faerie as a place, but simultaneously within and outside

it as a narrative form, as Story. With narratives that signal to the fantastic but do not

contain it, the reader is made to think about how much they depend on tropes and

traditions of the genre in informing their experience of fantasy. The more separate

from actual fantasy the more this realization is made clear, because the more the

reader has to be confronted with the way in which they construct and receive

fantasy.[86]

In addition, 'Locks', and similar non-fantasy but fantasy-like stories, can also be

compared with 'The Daughter of Owls' in that it makes use of language and style to

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[85] Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*, The Sandman Series, 66 (New York: Vertigo, 1995), p. 9.
[86] An argument can be made for applying this metafantastic approach to science fiction narratives, for instance, that reflect fantasy tropes and traditions but are not narratively-speaking fantasies because their apparent impossibility is explained within the confines of actual-world physics and logic. See McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern* series, Gene Wolfe's *The Shadow of the Torturer*, or the blurring of technology and magic in Jack Vance's *Dying Earth*.

make promises about the fantastic in order to suggest the existence of the fantasy

metatext to the reader, thereby activating their hypertextual responses. The

metafantasy in both stories is derived from the acknowledgement and usage of

fantasy as a whole, as a genre; Gaiman's poem, as already seen with the vast

majority of his oeuvre, is run or filtered, as it were, through Fantasy, so that it is

coloured with the essence of the genre. The difference between both tales is that

where 'Daughter' suggests an empty or false intertext, it is nonetheless a fantasy

story, meaning something truly wondrous (or at the very least uncanny) takes place.

'Locks', conversely, signals toward a true intertext – the fairytale of Goldilocks and

the three bears and its history – but does not deliver in its fantasy.

Metafantasy, then, accounts for those narratives that undeniably feel like fantasy, but

contextually are not, and explains why and how this occurs: they are narratives that

reveal a response to the genre of fantasy as a whole, creating both the feeling of

fantasy and the silencing or forging of what is critically accepted to be imperative

and inherent in the genre. Like fantasy before it, metafantasy can be selective in its

reconstructions, demonstrating a necessary dependence on fantasy-as-its-taproot

even as it chronologically, thematically and dialectically distances those taproots

from their original texts. Both of these first categories engage with the genre

metafictionally because they remind the reader that there is a recognizable genre to

which they are responding and/or which they are expecting.[87]

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[87] Ellen Kuchner's *Swordspoint* (1987) and Yves Meynard's *The Book of Knights* (1998) are just two
other examples of this type of narrative that contains no fantastic elements but is encoded as a fantasy
text thanks to the genre-expectation it triggers in fantasy readers.

III - Dubious Fantasy

The final type of metafantasy that exemplifies the existence of a fundamental (structural and functional) difference between metafantasy and fantasy, and therefore solidifies the fact that though metafantasy is transtextually connected to fantasy it does not belong to the genre of fantasy, comes in the form of 'dubious fantasies'. These narratives are named such for their association with fantasy, though a more accurate term would be 'metafantasies of indeterminate fantasy'. These constitute narratives that are told neither explicitly fantastically nor mundanely or realistically because though their response to the genre of fantasy is present, as with the previous two categories, they are neither explicitly inviting a fantasy reading nor denying the possibility of a fantasy reading.

These are probably the most complex metafantasies as they are ones whose narrative 'fantasiness' – their quality of being fantasy – relies solely on the reader's decision (based on their personal experience) to read them as either wondrous or uncanny while not entirely satisfying the characteristics of either the wondrous or the uncanny. They are not the former because they do not show objectively impossible realities that produce the doubling awareness of knowing it is fantasy but accepting it as possible. Metafantasies that tell a fantasy story mundanely contain this fundamentally necessary element of fantasy, as seen with 'Chivalry' or Aiken's 'Yes, But Today is Tuesday', in addition to calling attention to it. They are not the latter either because they create enough suggestions of the impossible that they cannot be satisfactorily explained, and the reader cannot be certain of the reality or unreality being portrayed. Metafantasies that tell a non-fantasy story fantastically

fall, critically speaking, either under the label of the uncanny or another genre altogether, for they contain nothing truly impossible, and their 'fantasiness' can be explained. Instead, they subvert what readers consider to be fantasy by toying with the genre's tropes, language and styles. In dubious fantasies, however, the reader is not and cannot be entirely certain that the narrative is fantasy or that it is not.

In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn argues that liminal fantasies, or more accurately, select liminal fantasies, manipulate 'different kinds of genres in ways that present [them] as full "generic" reading[s], yet rest their genreness precisely on that refusal'.[88] In other words, certain liminal fantasies rely on suggesting to the reader specific readings based on genre yet 'depend on the refusal of resolution' of the fantastic, so that readers are left with 'several options, each of which changes the generic direction of the [text]'.[89] Mendlesohn describes her category of liminal fantasy as '[not being] meant to bridge the gap between fantasy and mimesis, but a form of fiction that uses the expectations of the genre readers to which the text speaks in order to generate latency, constructed from the elements of equipoise and irony', which is why the majority of liminal fantasy narratives should more accurately be identified as responding metafictionally to the genre.[90] Because the 'knowingness' that Mendlesohn identifies is used to describe narratives that are clearly responding, reflecting or reacting to fantasy yet appear to undermine and/or

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[88] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 240.
[89] Mendlesohn, p. 240.
[90] Mendlesohn, p. 230.

outright lack certain features and elements expected of the genre, it is necessary to emphasise the need for a distinction between this form of fiction and fantasy.[91]

While, as seen, metafantasies can also be fantasy, even when playing with what the reader considers to be fantasy, the spectrum of metafantasy can extend to narratives that are not fantasies or that are indistinguishable from non-fantasies. Mendlesohn almost acknowledges this distinction as she suggests that books like Christopher Priest's alternate history novel *The Separation* (2002) and Peter Straub's suspense novel *lost boy lost girl* (2003) are 'less written *within* genre, than are written *about* it' with 'both books [demanding] that the reader take on board more than one set of genre codes if they are to be fully appreciated'.[92] It stands to reason that if the books are written about the genre, then they are outside of it and not part of it, genre-wise. Gaiman's short story 'Murder Mysteries' is another apt example of a narrative that leaves the reader, be they one with fantasy experience or not, in an indeterminate place where they cannot be certain (because the narrative provides no certainty) that anything fantastic takes place.

This decision is relegated to the reader and predicated on perspective and experience but neither a decision in favour of the wondrous nor the uncanny is intrinsically more desirable or valid. 'Murder Mysteries' is a story-within-a-story, and its framing narrative about an unnamed protagonist who meets the supposed angel Raguel who tells him the story of the first murder in heaven is devoid of any overt fantasy occurrences. The only inklings to an intrusion of the fantastic into the real

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[91] The notion of 'liminality' of fantasy, if seen from a metatextual perspective, can be useful as it precisely supports the illustration of a metafantasy fantasy spectrum that traverses from a genre core (of expectation), liminally outward to one of non-fantasy.

[92] Mendlesohn, p. 240.

world happens at the end of the story, where it is hinted that the protagonist

murdered his girlfriend and her child, only to have his memories erased by the angel

as an act of angelic forgiveness. This is, however, not explicitly stated:

> The man walked away down the darkened street, and I sat on the bench and
> watched him go. I felt like he had taken something from me, although I could
> no longer remember what. And I felt like something had been left in its place
> – absolution, perhaps, or innocence, although of what, or from what, I could
> no longer say.[93]

In addition, the very possibility of the protagonist having murdered his girlfriend is

itself never outwardly stated. The narrator's story is filled with blanks that make use

of conventions of storytelling about the arbitrary passage of time such as his 'I

simply don't remember what happened next' in between the scenes with his

girlfriend and the lone bench where he meets Raguel. This omission appears

inconsequential until the final offhanded mention of a triple murder of two women

and a child coupled with the protagonist's dream of blood. Gaiman plays with the

idea of how much can be and has to be said in order for the reader to reach certain

conclusions. This is as much applicable to the construction of story as it is to the

construction of a fantasy story, and Gaiman appears to be highly aware of it. If the

possibility of the protagonist having murdered his girlfriend, her daughter and

roommate is in doubt, then the absolution granted by the supposed angel is also in

doubt (thereby also his supernatural being).

On the other hand, there are enough suggestions in the narrative to support reading it

all as a psychological delusion of the protagonist. What Gaiman achieves,

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[93] Gaiman, 'Murder Mysteries', in *Smoke and Mirrors*, by Neil Gaiman, pp. 298-330 (p. 329).

nonetheless, is the production of a story that is completely open to the reader's

decision to read fantasy into the story or not. The reader is left in a half state

between the feeling of fantasy (based on recognition of certain tropes, particularly

present in the inner story's descriptions of heaven and heavenly beings, which are

very similar to these in *Sandman* and *Good Omens* where they are real) and a

hesitation over the possible reality of the story.[94] If Todorov's theories are applied

here, 'Murder Mysteries' reveals itself to be located permanently in the hesitation

state, incapable of giving in entirely to a fantastic and wondrous reading, nor to an

uncanny one. On the one hand, an argument can be made that to succumb to a purely

uncanny reading would be to relegate the fantasy in the narrative to the category of

symbolism and allegory, and to deny the genre's pretension to realism.[95]

Nonetheless, even if the reader was to conclude that the fantastic did not take place,

the feeling of fantasy and wonder is neither hindered or diminished in this particular

story because the self-contained nature of the fantastic narrative protects it from

falling apart if it is in fact unreal given that, from a metafictional standpoint, the

entirety of the story is unreal. Because the inner story is being treated as such by the

characters – a tale that could or could not be happening – the same hesitating

doubling that is applied to fantasy narratives is applied internally to the inner tale.

The unnamed protagonist has two choices: either the story he has been told is true,

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[94] Some of these tropes include both the storytelling beginning of 'This is true' and the angel's echo later of 'You want to hear a story? True story? Stories always used to be good payment.' which establish the fictionality of the narrative, even as (or because) it pretends to be true. The evocative and highly visual language used to describe heaven (the Silver City), angels and their functions, God, justice, and the Dark, is characteristic of the wondrous and epic language of other fantasy narratives: what Tolkien calls the power of subcreation through the use of adjectival language in fantasies. (Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', p. 122).

[95] Note Westfahl's '[fantasy texts] rely on impossible imagery and narratives [and] strive for realism', as well as Tolkien's preference for 'history, true or feigned' over allegory as he considers the latter restrictive. (Westfahl, ed., 'Surrealism', *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, p. 776; Tolkien, '*Foreword to the Second Edition*', in The Lord of the Rings (London: HarperCollins, 2005), p. xxii-xxv (p. xxii)).

in which case the protagonist exists in a universe (secondary world) where angels and murders in heaven are possible, making the story as a whole a definite fantasy for the actual reader, or the story is false, in which case he has been told a fantasy, and the actual reader has read a story about fantasy stories.

 In either case, the impact of fantasy on the reader is not diminished, as the fantastic (be it metafictionally or meta-metafictionally) is not actually undermined. In addition, both readings are predicated on the reader's expectation of fantasy as fantasy, instigated by the storytelling tropes prompted from the narrative, in particular the emphasis on the act of telling stories itself. Be it the protagonist's opening 'This is true', or Raguel's 'You want to hear a story? True story?', both statements, coupled with the nesting-stories format, signal to the club-story structure, which while not explicitly supernatural, has been employed by enough fantasies to make it a recognizable form. Club stories, when 'understood as fantasy [… lose] some of the contrast between frame and tale' and are commonly used to 'generate a sense of worldly verisimilitude' while being simultaneously unreliable.[96] In other words, the reader must decide what kind of storytelling the angel and the protagonist are engaged in, what kind of reader the protagonist is, as well as what kind of reader they themselves are.

Where 'Murder Mysteries' demonstrates this indeterminate doubling by actually separating the levels of fantasy and reality into two narrative levels, Graham Joyce's *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* also achieves this level of debatable and dubious fantasy, and indeed Joyce's purpose seems to be to avoid certainty at all costs, through the

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[96] Clute, 'Club Story', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant, p. 207.

usage of separation techniques like paratextual suggestion, psychological analyses and unreliable personal accounts. The novel centres on the Martin family beginning at the moment when the Martins' daughter, Tara, suddenly and inexplicably returns after being missing for twenty years. Tara's explanation for her absence is that she was whisked away by a member of a fairy commune, among whom she lived for six months before being returned home. Despite this apparently fantastic premise, the novel proceeds to focus on Tara's family as they cope with her return, while Tara herself is evaluated and counselled by a psychiatrist.

The narrative point of view of the novel, which switches back and forth between the present and twenty years prior, and between several different characters, means that the reader is only ever exposed to something that could be classified as 'the fantastic' subjectively, through Tara's memories, and this itself is not introduced until the eleventh chapter. Throughout, the psychiatrist's counsel plays the voice of reason against the wondrous, attempting to convince Tara that her experiences, though strange, fall no further than in an uncanny level. At the same time, however, Joyce is careful not to completely provide a definitive explanation for Tara's disappearance – her apparent time displacement and utter lack of memories for her two missing decades remains a question that can only be satisfactorily answered through a fantasy reading.

Joyce balances fantasy and the mundane without yielding to either; the narration that takes place in the primary world (the majority of it) is coloured with an air of magical possibility, while Tara's descriptions of the fairy commune are mundanely explained through hallucinogens. The way in which the reader reads the novel is left

entirely up to them because Joyce offers just enough suggestions and references to one possibility as he does the other. The psychiatrist's explanations are medically and psychologically valid, so that the reader can choose to accept them as reality, but the paratextual construction of the book and the lack of definitive answers to Tara's predicament also perfectly support the fantasy reality. Joyce's metafantasy is especially represented in those paratextual references. From the title, to the epigraphs that begin each chapter, the introducing narration, and the storytelling style peppered throughout, the experienced fantasy reader is actively encouraged to adopt a fantasy reading; the promise of fantasy, as discussed with 'Locks', suggests to the fantasy reader that they should employ their genre experiences in decoding the mystery of Tara's disappearance.

Simultaneously, the metafictive acknowledgment of the recursiveness and even pervasiveness of fantasy in western culture is validly used to suggest non-fantasy psychoanalytical readings, i.e., that Tara's experience is a result of her knowledge and experience with fantasy literature/media. Yet, as with Gaiman's 'Murder Mysteries', neither the fantasy nor the reality collapses if the reader chooses one reading over the other. Because metafantasy is not predicated on the coherency and consistency of fantasy's fundamental feature, i.e. the impossible, its purpose – to respond to fantasy as a whole – , is not affected by there being or not being actual fantasy in the story because the awareness of fantasy, its construction, elements, structures and readerly implications are all present in the referencing. This is the reason such texts appear to be liminal, yet they also appear to be intrinsically linked to quintessential perceptions of the genre; their fantasiness is entirely dependent on experienced fantasy readers reading them as such, yet, unlike the previous two

categories described above, dubious fantasies do not preclude non-fantasy readings but instead thrive on hesitation by refusing to fully give in to the fulfilment of genre expectation.

While metafantasy can affect this dubiousness by limiting the narrative's instances of fantastic occurrence, as well as by limiting the fantasy to a secondary narrative level, as Gaiman does with 'Murder Mysteries', it is interesting to note how limitless in its response to fantasy the form can truly be in terms of offering up multiple readings depending on the type of reader. Jo Walton's *Among Others* is another ideal example of a novel that is at face value blatantly targeted at experienced fantasy and sf readers, yet at the same time produces no conclusively impossible events or elements. The story, told as a series of diary entries, centres on a young girl named Morwenna, a lover of science fiction and fantasy books, as she moves from Wales to an all-girls boarding school in England and copes with her new life by seeking solace in her stories. According to her entries, Mor can see fairies and do magic, and believes her estranged mother to be a witch that she must protect herself against. Where *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* is restrained in its presentation of anything overtly fantastic, even when describing the fairy commune Tara visited, *Among Others* revels in the fantastic overload through Mor's detailed descriptions and explanations of fairies and fairy culture.

In being a narrative about fantasy stories, about fantasy being (possibly) real, and about the act of reading such narratives, *Among Others* ticks most of the characteristics common in metafantasies. It is not merely a fantasy about a girl who sees fairies, but about a girl who knows about fantasy as a literary form, and who

uses her knowledge from fiction as a tool to make sense of her reality. The experienced fantasy reader, then, is both aware of their common interest connection with Mor, as well as the discrepancy between their life and Mor's, i.e., that the reader of fantasy will not encounter fairies themselves. However, they must also contend with the possibility that in Mor – and metatextually the narrative – being aware of fantasy as a whole, she, like the reader, is not actually experiencing anything fantastic. Walton anticipates and plays with this notion from the very start; the novel's the unreliable-diary format allows Mor to break the fourth wall, as it were, and speak directly to the assumed reader (or assumed receptor) thereby making both assurances of the reality of the fantasy as well as fueling their hesitation. This latter reaction, similar to that incited by the psychiatrist in Joyce's novel, supports non-fantasy readings of the text.

For example, in the novel's prologue, Mor's self-awareness of story mirrors Walton's and the experienced fantasy reader's, so that by acknowledging the very real dynamics of storytelling and the connection fantasy has, as a genre, to storytelling, in particular its fictitiousness, the novel's fantasy possibility bleeds into reality and vice versa:

> *Think of this as a memoir. Think of it as one of those memoirs that's later discredited to everyone's horror because the writer lied and is revealed to be a different colour, gender, class and creed from the way they'd made everybody think. I have the opposite problem. I have to keep fighting to stop making myself sound more normal. Fiction's nice. Fiction lets you select and simplify. This isn't a nice story, and this isn't an easy story. But it is a story about fairies, so feel free to think of it as a fairy story. It's not like you'd believe it anyway.*[97]

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[97] Jo Walton, *Among Others* (London: Corsair, 2013), p. 15.

The acknowledgment of fairy stories and the cynical tone grant the protagonist a certain mimetic quality, i.e., her self-awareness makes her more real to the reader. At the same time, the remembrance of fiction and storicity inevitably reminds the reader of the self-contained nature of the narrative, which then doubles back, contradictorily, against the metafictive breaking of the bounds of the story by referencing it, the reader, and their common knowledge of fantasy. *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* maintains its genre expectation through the referential epigraphs while *Among Others* maintains it through the protagonist's belief and through her references and reflections on the sf and fantasy books she reads.

Where Joyce's balancing voice of reason comes mainly from the psychiatrist and Tara's family, Walton's also comes from Morwenna in that, in her living vicariously through her books, her experiences amongst the fairies and magic are granted a fictional quality akin to a quixotic dream. Though reading it in this way changes the generic categorization of the novel, it does not minimize the metafantastic impact being suggested to the reader. In fact, the argument can be made that without entertaining the possibility that the fantastic does not actually occur, the reader loses the opportunity to evaluate their own reading perceptions of how fantasy influences them and they influence fantasy. At the same time, Mor's explicit depictions of her interactions with the fairies, her attempts at magic, and her final battle with her mother lose their potency if rendered entirely delusionary. While both readings can be partially supported, the novel is strongest in its combination and maintenance of both readings, which can only be achieved metafantastically as both genre and non-genre.

Conclusions

Using analyses of self-awareness and levels of metafiction to determine the underlying narrative structures and functional dynamics of these stories has revealed not only fantasy's metafictiveness and the presence of metafantasy but the inherent differences between a fantasy narrative and a narrative about fantasy. It is this distinction that allows metafantasy narratives to silence fantasy's pretension at reality and storytelling, and to voice the constructedness (storicity) of fantasy. Through this, a metafantasy story can make a fantasy narrative speak with a different voice, or make non-fantasy narratives speak with a fantasy-like voice, in either case demonstrating that because fantasy can be recognized as a genre, it can be used as a deconstructive tool upon said genre. Whether the metafantasy is also fantastic or not, it reflects an authorial and readerly awareness (meaning, a fantasy-reading community) of the act of constructing fantasy, and revels in the freedom of such constructions. If it appears to strip fantasy of its fundamental features, it is only so it can lay bare and exploit these structures and construction in order to revel (playfully or seriously) in the questions regarding the processes of storytelling and their significance to readers' and writers' own constructions of reality.

Metafantasy narratives then are called such when they achieve these two standards: first, the deconstruction of and commentary on fantasy through the revelation of transtextual reliance on fantasy stories as a concept and/or the need for an awareness of the genre's tropes and traditions in order to approach it; and second, the maintaining of a feeling/remembrance/ acknowledgement of fantasy. Thus, metafantasy as a metafiction enacted upon a metafictive genre accounts for the

subversive taproot-mixing fantasies of Pratchett or Gaiman, for those narratives that purposefully and noticeably deviate from the perceived-as-established traditions of the genre, and for those fictions that are only considered 'fantasies' by specific readers based on their own past experiences with the genre and the readings prompted from the text even when nothing impossible or marvellous occurs.

This chapter has also revealed that the reason why a category such as Mendlesohn's liminal fantasy is problematic is because although it identifies many of the characteristics of metafantasy – namely the dynamics of knowingness and genre expectation, and the playing with the characteristics and delimitations of the genre and subverting them – by calling them fantasies, whether borderline or not, the category implies that these narratives reside within the genre. By considering them fantasies, however liminally, the subversive nature of some of these narratives comes to be in contradiction with the illusion of inner narrative coherence expected and maintained by traditional fantasies because they imply not only that the fantastic is possible within the consistency of the world (primary or secondary) they describe, but that the fantastic exists as a literary form the reader is meant to remember, identify and utilise in order to decode and ascribe meaning to the reading. In addition, calling narratives that do not contain traces of the impossible and marvellous fantasy simply because they are aimed at certain readers, or because certain experienced readers of fantasy would be inclined to read them in fantastic ways, ultimately undermines the genre itself, as it makes provisions and exceptions for texts that do not fulfil or come close to the genre's function and fundamental features at all.

The application of the term 'liminal fantasy' to some of these narratives stretches the boundaries of the definitions of fantasy (which are vague and fuzzy enough because of the intrinsic intangibility of the subject matter – consider Tolkien's 'Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible') to a point where they become not only unwieldy, but impractical in their inclusivity.[98] Recognizing that these narratives operate on another narrative level to fantasy that is inextricably linked to it but distinct nonetheless lifts the limitations imposed (or implied) by the genre, accounts for the ascriptions made experienced readers, and allows for the existence of a form that responds to the genre but does not have to follow it. Moreover, it reveals the growth that fantasy has experienced and how it affects readers' receptions on a cultural unconscious level as a whole instead of as a collection of individual texts. Metafantasy, in essence, is a mirror for the entirety of the fantasy metatext, its blatant and subtle elements, its taproots and its surroundings, and more importantly, of the culture(s) that produce and have produced it. It is not its evolutionary successor, but its evaluator. Fantasy, as a modern genre and all the literary and cultural baggage that entails, becomes the deconstructive theory employed by metafantasy in its construction of fiction. As fantasy confronts and subverts reality, placing the reader in a state of double awareness of reality and fiction, so does metafantasy confront and subvert fantasy (its metatextual reality) and places the reader (be they fantasy readers or not) in a suggestive state of awareness of fantasy (metafictively subverting reality and fiction) and fiction as a whole.

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[98] Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', p. 114.

Conclusions

'In Books, and Ages, and Life... the ending can never truly be written'.[1]

This thesis set out to demonstrate that the modern genre of fantasy operates metafictionally, always revealing its fictionality and offering a continuous commentary, through its fabulatory impulses, on the conscious act of storytelling and the conscious act of reading fantastic stories. In the first chapter of this work, it established four main points of analysis with which to demonstrate fantasy's metafictionality: a comparative theoretical analysis of the critical rhetoric used to describe fantasy and metafiction, an analysis of the metafictional way in which fantasy relies on its intertextual connections to a historical taproot, an exploration of readers and fantasy readers' hypertextual responses to fantasy, and finally and most significantly, an analysis of the genre's most intrinsic feature – its impossibility and subversive stance against the consensus of reality.

By establishing this fact regarding fantasy's nature and relation to fiction, it was possible to address a number of concerns that have appeared in contemporary literary criticism regarding the appearance and increase of self-aware genre-based deconstructive responses. Thus, fantasy's self-reflexivity, its apparent contradictory hesitation between the objectively impossible and necessarily plausible present in 'wonder', its subversiveness, the reason for its impossibility, and its contemporary drive toward hyperaware cyclical reflections on the genre as its represented subject, all find correlations in metafiction theory and modern genre theories of evolution and functional transformations.

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[1] Cyan Worlds, *Riven*, dir. by Robyn Miller and Richard Vander Wende (Novato, CA: Red Orb Entertainment, 1997).

Questions raised by texts such as Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* about what is actually taking place in liminally-described or irregular narratives are also more effectively answered when fantasy's metafictionality is acknowledged, and, more importantly, when a metatextual move toward growing metafantastic approaches is recognized. Because of this, this thesis proposed and demonstrated the need for the term 'metafantasy', through the use of both a practical study that identified the varied forms of metafantasy as employed by Neil Gaiman, and a comparative theoretical genre analysis that explored the structural and thematic connections between fantasy and metafantasy. Metafantasy silences fantasy's pretension at reality and storytelling and voices the fabrication – the constructiveness and storicity – of fantasy. It therefore makes fantasy narratives speak with a different voice, and makes non-fantasy narratives speak with a fantasy-like voice. Both and either one reflects awareness of the act of fantasy construction and its freedom. If it appears to strip fantasy of its fundamental features, it is only so it can lay bare and exploit its structures and construction and revel playfully and seriously in any and all questions regarding the storytelling process itself and its significance to the reader's (and the writer's) own constructions of reality and generic fantasy.

This conclusion will focus on three aspects: answering final pertinent questions regarding the scope of metafantasy, proposing further applications to both the comparative analyses between metafiction and fantasy and the one between fantasy and metafantasy, and proposing a possible avenue of research regarding the structure of fantasy and metafiction based on Brian Attebery's discussion of fantasy as mode.

This latter aspect was considered as a section of the thesis, and was later cut for being tangential to the primary argument. However, there is substantial critical impact to be gained from further analysis of fantasy, metafiction, and subsequently metafantasy, from a modal approach.

Finalizing Additional Research Questions and Implications:

I – Limitations in the Study

From the beginning and over the course of this extensive investigative work it was always clear that the focus on genre theory involved maintaining a wide scope of primary and secondary texts in order to make informed assertions about the state and structure of said genre. Because of this, texts needed to be carefully selected as representative of the genre from readerly, critical, and historical perspectives. This was especially important for Chapter One, as developing the theory that fantasy is intrinsically metafictive needed to have substantial support from actual primary sources – a difficult task given the genre's 150-200 year old history (if placing the beginnings of the genre between MacDonald's *Phantastes* (150) and the period after Enlightenment (200), as most do). A balance was struck between utilising influential texts – those that critically and culturally helped shape the genre into the market product it is now – and analysing the ways in which critics and writers have discussed and theorized about fantasy. This allowed for the reconciliation of the scope of the claim that fantasy is a metafictive genre with the inevitably limited scope of the texts used. Furthermore, by identifying and dividing metafictive theory into four categories of comparison and analysis, and applying it to the genre's

narrative and thematic structures, it was possible to successfully accomplish this thesis' first aim.

It is acknowledged, nonetheless, that there are plenty of influential texts that were not addressed; this often occurred when multiple examples of texts could be given, but space-constraints and time made it impractical to cover them. Conversely, the second and most substantial part of this work required a narrower approach in order to efficiently name and describe metafantasy. By responding metafictively to an already-metafictive genre, metafantasy has been swiftly becoming a popular and far-reaching form since the 1960s.[2] However, because metafantasy is not an established term, as discussed at the beginning of Chapter Two, a comparative analysis of the theory of metafantasy could not be conducted, calling for, instead, a practical study. Selecting a large variety of texts would have resulted in a disjointed analysis, and would have appeared as though texts were cherry-picked to suit the explored categories. Instead, the most appropriate course of action was focusing on a specific author who has become well-known for his vast referential input, his well-documented self-aware and theoretically self-critical approach to fiction and the fantastic genres, as well as the highly diverse and eclectic content of his work.

Neil Gaiman's status as one of the most prominent postmodern fabulists of the twenty-first century made him the ideal candidate to demonstrate the existence of metafantasy and its wide range. At six novels for adults, a 75-issue graphic novel, and three official short-story collections containing over 60 stories between them,

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[2] It is no surprise that this is so given that metafiction was first identified as a form in the 1960s, postmodern literature was reaching its peak, fantasy, the fantastic, and fabulation were being extensively studied critically, and the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series was launched, cementing fantasy as a genre in the cultural consciousness. Peter Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* (1968) could be considered one of the first metafantasies.

the majority of which are metafantastic to some degree, Gaiman's oeuvre provided enough primary material to thoroughly identify metafantasy's structures and functions. To this, complimentary primary sources were added in order to contextualize and offer an inclusive overview of the history and ongoing impact of metafantasy. While a comprehensive listing of texts detailing the chronological evolution of metafantasy might have been desired, such a direction would have resulted in a far-too prescriptive and structuralist taxonomy. Instead, focusing on specific forms of metafiction applied to fantasy within a single author's versatile work enabled metafantasy to be defined and described.

II – Questions and Implications

One implication that could be assumed from the studies conducted in chapters Two through Four is that there are only a limited number of metafantastic forms, from parody to genre-aware characters, to dubious fantasies. On the contrary, this thesis hopes to demonstrate that metafantasy, through its knowing genre-centric responses to an already metafictive genre, expands and revitalizes the literary possibilities of fantasy because it essentially defamiliarizes while simultaneously foregrounding familiarity. Other forms of metafantasy therefore include knowing and responsive reinventions of the genre, as China Miéville purposefully does in *Perdido Street Station* (2000) and Brian K. Vaughan does in the graphic novel series *Saga* (2012-). Both texts are responding to cultural perceptions of the genre of fantasy, yet consciously avoiding using its tropes and metatext in order to find new ways of depicting the genres' fundamental impossibility feature. Genre-mixing might also be a metafantasy kind of meta-metafiction, exemplified by Gaiman's *The Sandman*,

where the narrow often-exclusive barriers between fantasy and science fiction, in particular, are intentionally challenged. In essence, any narrative which is employing fantasy and the fantasy metatext as a tool with which to deconstruct the way modern fantasy stories are constructed, and challenge cultural and critical notions of its genre structures and boundaries is a metafantasy.

This raises another question concerning whether or not there can be an infinite number of meta-metafictions, infinitely doubling and reflecting upon the last. Based on the literary criticism and genre theory employed in this investigation, the notion that there could be is unlikely and illogical. A meta-metafiction is questioning the way metafictional stories are constructed, making the reader aware of the already metafictive dynamics taking place in the fiction. Where the reader of fantasy occupies a place of simultaneous recognition and rejection of a notion of reality, the metafantasy reader occupies one of recognition and rejection of the traditional notions and acceptance of a fantasy narrative's inner reality, and all that that implies. This is only effective because of the already-knowing stance the fantasy reader takes in the face of the fantastic. A non-fantastic example of this doubling dynamic is the meta-joke, i.e., a joke about jokes. For example:

> *A convention of comedians is gathered together. Everyone knows all of the jokes in the world, which have been numbered. This saves comedians from having to tell the joke itself. One comedian gets up and yells "266,452." Everyone laughs like crazy. A comedian whispers to his friend, "Never heard that one before."*[3]

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[3] Arthur Asa Berger, *The Genius of the Jewish Joke* (New Bunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), p. 59.

Jokes are an already meta device; they are predicated on knowing and understanding the components of a joke in order for it to be successful. In an article on metahumour and genres, Helga Kotthoff explains that jokes work on the basis that the participants in the joke, the teller and recipients, understand and recognize that a joke is being told that is in some way contrary to or in an 'implausible' manner relative to reality, but which is nonetheless contextualized by it.[4] The above metajoke therefore necessitates the knowledge of how jokes work – i.e., recognition of their already-knowing stance – in addition to the knowing stance they are already taking. The joke is humorous because it is referring to the need for insider knowledge and awareness in understanding a joke, while also employing it. However, once this level is reached – the awareness of awareness – any additional self-referential doubling would be redundant.[5] With meta-metafiction, then, once the metafictive reflection of a genre's metatext is reached, it would be redundant for there to be further metafictive reactions to a meta-metafictive response.

The only way this could take place is if metafantasy, for instance, became an independent or self-sustained genre itself, though this is difficult to envision. A more likely outcome, taking postmodernism as an example, would be a return to less metafantastic fantasy. Such texts would still retain influences from metafantasy (see Chapter Four's discussion of genre-evolution), but would be actively deviating from such metafictive approaches to the genre. This might spawn something akin to post-metafantasy or anti-metafantasy, though such narratives are also merely theoretical. This, of course, leads to the final question of whether or not traditional non-metafantastic fantasy can and is still being written. As Chapter Four, modern genre

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[4] Helga Kotthoff, 'Oral Genres of Humor: On the Dialectic of Genre Knowledge and Creative Authoring', *Pragmatics*, 17 (2007), pp. 263-296.

[5] See also Mark Currie's introduction to *Metafiction*, (London: Longman Group Ltm., 1995).

theorists, and critics like Attebery have suggested, genre transformations not only change the forward output of a genre, but also the hypertextual perceptions of it. Tolkien's elves are as much influenced by their intertext, and as influential to later depictions of elves, as they are influential to the perceptions of those very intertextual taproots and are in turn influenced by the texts that would come later. Genre is not closed and immutable, and fantasy, because of its metatextual transformations of its pre-texts and by its metafantasies, is doubly affected by this ceaseless change.

This leads to the conclusion that on one hand, non-metafantastic fantasy must still be produced because taproots still exist and continue to influence authors' imaginations. On the other hand, the effect of metafantasy, metafiction as a whole, and the general state of, in particular, Western culture's postmodern leaning toward self-awareness, has in many regards irrevocably changed how modern fantasy is produced. The influx of metafantasies, even in texts targeted at children and young adults who, arguably, possess a more limited transtext than adult fantasy readers, is evidence of this. Novels like Genevieve Cogman's *The Invisible Library* (2015), Holly Black's *Darkest Part of the Forest* (2015), or Catherynne M. Valente's *Fairyland* series (2011-2015) for children and young adults, are recent examples.

However, Gaiman has also proven that non-metafantastic fantasy stories can still be written, as the majority of his children's novels, *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book* in particular, contain very little that would be considered genre-savvy or knowing. Other novels like Naomi Novik's *Temeraire* series (2006-), Jo Walton's *Tooth and Claw* (2003), or Victoria (V.E.) Schwab's *A Darker Shade of Magic* (2015) while

possessing an underlying understanding of the state of the genre, also do not allude to either the metatext or literary fantasy, or the culture and criticism of fantasy as a genre at all. This all seems to indicate that while awareness of fantasy as a recognizable market and literary distinction is prevalent and even culturally pervasive, it does not preclude narratives from not engaging in such theoretical discourses. Where fiction perhaps now contains or is more at ease with metafictional reflections, it has not been replaced by metafiction entirely. Equally, metafantasy would be unlikely to remain if traditional fantasies were not still being produced.

Suggestions for Further Study:

I - Science Fiction and Horror as Metafiction

Demonstrating that fantasy is a metafictive genre – inherently self-reflective and self-denouncing – opens up a discourse concerning the other genres grouped under the umbrella terms of 'the Fantastic' and 'Speculative Fiction', especially the other two major genres, science fiction and horror. Even from a solely Todorovian model, flawed as it is, the Fantastic is predicated on a recognition of the fiction first as a fiction and second as containing elements intrinsically contrary, subversive, or estranging to the general consensus of reality and the constitution of the actual world. Whether, in this model, a text is to be categorized as belonging to the marvellous or the uncanny genres, Todorovian hesitation comes from the conscious acknowledgement that the world or elements depicted are in opposition to perceptions of the 'real' world, and must therefore be resolved through an agreement between reader and narrative.

Darko Suvin's notions of cognitive estrangement in science fiction can also be applied here. As Perry Nodelman summarises in his review of *Metamorphoses*, science fiction 'evokes the central paradox of the genre; science fiction pretends to take the objectivity of the world it describes for granted, yet clearly does not describe the objective world as we know it to be. It is "scientific," but clearly unrealistic'.[6] This, as with fantasy, suggests a conscious metafictive positioning on part of the sf author, the text, and the reader. Suvin described sf in very self-conscious terms, as a mirror that simultaneously reflects and transforms, grounded in presupposed ideas in order to confront set normative systems – a proposition very similar to that of metafiction.[7] Indeed, the fact that Suvin cited the Russian Formalists and their contemporaries in his argument, further supports this; Brecht's definition of estrangement (or rather, 'Verfremdungseffekt') emphasises the doubled nature of this ostensibly subversive style: 'a representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar'.[8] The connection to metafiction is unmistakable, as it is practically echoing Waugh's definition of the form as 'the *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of fiction', i.e., estranging fiction by analysing it from an unfamiliar outsider's perspective, but simultaneously maintaining that recognition of its subject by being a fiction.

The parallel history between sf and fantasy (and the entirety of the modern fantastic generic mode) where they emerge from radical changes in philosophical and

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[6] Perry Nodelman, 'The Cognitive Estrangement of Darko Suvin', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 5 (Winter 1981), pp. 24-27 (p. 24.)
[7] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 5.
[8] Suvin, p. 6.

scientific discourses that followed the Enlightenment further indicates that there are correspondences between metafiction and the fantastic genres. Whether, in broad and extremely simplistic terms, fantasy aims toward the impossible and sf toward the possible, both are nonetheless foregrounding their responses on a consensus of reality and traditions of presenting that consensus fictionally, in order to deviate, subvert, or estrange that reality for the purpose of creating a dialogue about either imagination or about the constructedness of reality. This means that there is a distinct possibility that there exists a meta-science-fiction (a meta-metafiction about science fiction as a genre) as much as it is a given that science fiction itself is intrinsically metafictive.

Research into the metafictive properties of sf texts as well as of the genre as a whole has become increasingly numerous since the 1980s, and even more so in the 2000s. For example, in Mark Rose's *Alien Encounters* he states that Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* is 'a highly self-conscious fiction that is as much a work of generic criticism as it is a new text in the genre', a perspective that Sandor Klapcsik later explores in order to argue that *Solaris* is engaging in a metacommentary on both science and on the genre of science fiction.[9] Rose even explores science fiction as a social phenomenon, describing it as 'a set of expectations rather than as something that resides within a text' while at the same time possessing deep-seeded connections (though not as intrinsically intertextual as fantasy) with its influential history.[10]

Within other specific areas of research, plenty of sf texts have been analysed for their metafictive properties. Philip K. Dick's oeuvre, for instance, receives ample

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[9] Mark Rose, *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 82.
[10] Rose, p. 5.

attention for its metafictive and postmodern structures, as does William Gibson's

Neuromancer, and Samuel R. Delany's works. Most significantly, in 2011 Amanda

Dillon submitted her doctoral thesis specifically on the subject of structurally

analysing the 'narratological similarity between science fiction and the common

literary technique of metafiction', with the aim of proposing, as this thesis on

fantasy does, that 'science fiction is inherently metafictional because of the way it

foregrounds its world […as a] form of textual deixis'.[11]

Finally, in terms of a meta-metafictive form of sf, one article worth noting in

particular is Teresa L. Ebert's 1980 insightful essay where she breaks down science

fiction into three 'streams' that she believes encompasses the kind of sf produced at

the time. For all three, metafictive tendencies can be identified. Into the first

category she places 'traditional science fiction' whose focus is to '"extrapolate"

from the present givens of contemporary science and technology and predict, in a

believable fashion, the effects of science on human destiny'.[12] Though this is a

rather generalist description, a correspondence to Suvin's cognitive view of sf and

market/readerly perceptions of 'traditional sf' as 'believable' can be found, and

these are, structurally, also metafictional. Ebert's second category, which is even

more metafantastic (the term here is used to refer to the Fantastic as the overarching

genre, for lack of a self-evident term solely reserved for sf), she terms 'parascience

fiction' because it focuses on the more common perceptions of the genre and 'has

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[11] Amanda Dillon, '"Prism, Mirror, Lens": Metafiction and Narrative Worlds in Science Fiction' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 2011), p. 2.
[12] Teresa L. Ebert, 'The Convergence of Postmodern Innovative Fiction and Science Fiction', *Poetics Today*, 1 (Summer 1980), pp. 91-104 (p. 92).

the tendency to leave the literary domain altogether and move into T.V. serials, films

and comic strips'.[13]

It is her third category that is of most interest as it demonstrates that there is an

operating meta-metafictive current in science fiction as much as there is in fantasy.

This is what Ebert terms 'metascience fiction', defining it as 'the science fiction that

moves beyond thematic extrapolation and formal mimesis in order to celebrate the

fabulatory human imagination in-and-for itself, [where] the entertainment or story-

telling function that dominated traditional science fiction is backgrounded, and the

literary and aesthetic functions are foregrounded'.[14] Like the analysis conducted in

this thesis, Ebert's metascience fiction describes a fiction that reflects genre

conventions and perceptions in addition to the already present metafictive structure

that the genre inherently possesses. These observations, however, are all based on

cursory glances at the landscape of science fiction criticism, yet they all point

toward a clear need for further theoretical study.

Concerning the genre of supernatural horror (as well as the supernatural gothic), a

genre often paired with fantasy because of its gothic and supernatural impulses

which nonetheless has altogether different functions to fantasy, comparisons to

metafiction can also be drawn. While the origins of modern horror as emergent from

the gothic can be traced back in a similar fashion as fantasy and sf to the rise of the

Enlightenment, the relation between the depiction of reality in the horror text and

agreements about the actual world are much more tenuous than in the other two

main genres. In *The Greenwood Encyclopedia*, Darrell Schweitzer puts the

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[13] Ebert, p. 92.
[14] Ebert, pp. 92-93.

beginnings of modern horror in the 1940s though, like *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, he describes it according to its effects. Moreover, horror stories can be set in both mundane and fantastic worlds. In these concluding propositions for further application, the kind of horror that might be explored metafictionally is this latter supernatural and fantastic kind.

The problems that can be anticipated in examining this genre's possible metafictiveness lie in the function of the estrangement element in relation to the depicted world, metatextually speaking. Both fantasy and science fiction narratives take a stance against the consensus of reality, purposefully depicting a world unlike the reader's – even if quite similar to the reader's actual world – because they either contain something implicitly impossible, or something knowingly different if arguably possible. Traditional supernatural horror, on the other hand, commonly fulfils more mimetic functions, akin, in many ways, to magic realism. Instead, then, of a narrative producing wonder or even frightful wonder (as in the case of Lovecraft's mythos) in the face of the, from the reader's perspective, objectively impossible because that awareness is the fantasy's point, the horror text produces fear and a sense of wrongness in the face of a possible unknown. If, as Clute puts it, 'the monsters of horror are befoulers of the boundaries that mark us off from the Other', it is because they suggest that boundary between the supernatural and whatever is regarded as reality is breakable.[15] Fantasy, conversely, foregrounds this boundary textually through its self-pronouncing impossibility.

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[15] John Clute, 'Horror', in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. by John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1999), p. 478.

Narratological analyses in conjunction with structural deconstructions would need to be conducted in order to determine whether horror is or can be metafictional as a genre. There is plenty of contemporary evidence to suggest that horror can be metafictional in singular texts, and even that a text can respond metafictionally to genre traditions and conventions (as several horror parody and pastiche films like *Army of Darkness*, *Scream*, and *Shaun of the Dead* have proven). However, the question remains whether the genre is inherently metafictional because the construction of stories with pervading supernatural intrusions betrays a self-awareness of fiction and storytelling. Gothic literature, conversely, might fare better on this analysis, as the setting in most Gothic fiction already informs the reader that the narrative is in opposition to traditional depictions and perceptions of reality. There is certainly an argument to be made in favour of Gothic fiction being considered the first of the fantastic genres to have employed the doubled metafiction – a metagothic-fiction – described in this thesis. Many of M.R. James's works, for example, show a highly self-aware understanding and acknowledgement of the gothic as a genre to imitate and deconstruct, with a readership that understands how these elements interact with one another, and their transtextual relevance.

One avenue to pursue in this discussion can be to establish a parallel between the feeling of unbalance or the sense of overwhelming discomfort/uncertainty produced by metafictions like Borges' 'The Library of Babel' and horror. Here, part of the metafiction's effect in describing an endlessly recursive repository of knowledge is defeat in the face of reality. If, like Scholes' description of metafiction, it '[attempts] to find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality', then it is making suggestions about the fictionality of the

reader's reality based on the reality of the text's fiction.[16] If this, then, can indeed be described as producing a sense of dread that is similar to that of supernatural horror, then a responsive comparison between how a metafiction like Borges' affects the reader's perception of their reality, and how a horror narrative affects it, can be established.

Finally, in terms of horror as a literary form that might engage in meta-metafictive dynamics, attention can be drawn to Dr. Sarah Dillon's current work in the subject, and some remarks made during the keynote address at the annual Current Research in Speculative Fiction conference in 2015. There, she commented on the influx of critical scholarly texts on the genres of fantasy and sf between the late 2000s and early 2010s in contrast to an apparent lack of similar critical scholarly texts for the genre of horror (it should be noted, also, that she specifically distanced horror from its more traditionally literary origin, Gothic fiction). This influx, she explained, is not indicative of an ending or completion to the genres, but of the formation of more or less stable centres, of not just texts with similar elements, styles, themes, etc., but of something which, whether formulated as mode, formula, market or reader-influenced, is recognized as a modern genre. Seen thusly, though fantasy like the rest of the fantastic and speculative genres might still be 'working itself through', as Wolfe put it, it is enough of a cohesive entity to spur commenting, reflective, deconstructive, and self-aware subversive fictions. The same can easily be said about science fiction, and it seems self-evident, though there is little critical scholarship that reflects this, that the same is true of horror.

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[16] Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 8.

Critical scholarship specifically on horror that does exist, includes studies like James

B. Twitchell's *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* in 1985 and

Noël Carroll's *Philosophy of Horror* in 1990. In addition, essays like Lovecraft's

influential *Supernatural Horror in Literature* written and revisited throughout the

1920s and 30s (published in 1945), and Marshall B. Tymn's reference guide *Horror*

Literature in 1981, further demonstrate a readerly and critical consciousness of

horror as genre, which as shown, is one of the factors that spurns metafantastic

reactions.[17] Gary William Crawford's essay in *Horror Literature* reveals this

metafictive stance, as he calls the modern fiction of supernatural horror 'a literature

of consciousness', positing that 'the genre itself manifests this attitude toward its

own existence as a genre'.[18] One last study that might also prove to be significant in

a discussion of horror as metafiction is Jarkko Toikkanen's *The Intermedial*

Experience of Horror where he proposes that horror occupies the point at which the

reader's experience of imagination fails, i.e., where they are 'intermedially

suspended' between 'words and images, and what they could possibly signify'.[19]

In conclusion, this thesis's method of analysing a genre across four specific areas

(critical definitions and theory, intertextuality, reader response, and knowing

subversion) to determine a genre's metafictive properties and functions can be

effectively applied to in-depth research into other genres of the fantastic. Equally,

the wide-ranging study of Gaiman's works, from his novels and comics to stories

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[17] It should be noted, then, that where Dillon bemoans the lack of critical scholarship on the subject, others like Tymn, Twitchell, and Carroll, all begin by citing an increase in interest in modern horror.
[18] Gary William Crawford, 'The Modern Masters, 1920-1980', *Horror Literature*, ed. by Marshall B. Tymn New York: Bowker, 1981), pp. 276-369 (p. 276). See also Lovecraft's chapter equally titled 'Modern Masters' where he also discusses horror literature from very self-conscious genre-minded perspectives, in addition to situating it within an 'evolutionary' history.
[19] Jarkko Toikkanen, *The Intermedial Experience of Horror* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. viii.

and poems, has proven both the existence and mode of operation of a doubly-metafictive form, as well as provided a template for seven distinct meta-metafictive studies – four on metafantastic fantasy texts and three on metafantasy texts that subvert the fundamental features of the genre – that can be adapted to fantasy's genre siblings.

II – Metafiction and Fantasy as Narrative Modes

Because the focus of this thesis is on fantasy as a modern genre and the metafictive implications of that premise, the possibility of also exploring fantasy as a narrative mode and how metafiction and metafantasy would fit into that category, was put aside because, first, it deviated from the primary topic, and second, it would have necessitated, at the very least, a chapter-long analysis. It is, therefore, relegated to this Conclusion's suggestions for further related study.

In the previously discussed 'Transformations of Genre', Alistair Fowler explores what he calls 'generic modulation' – 'a process whereby some genres, at a certain point in their history, extend into much broader, "modal" entities which can combine with and modify other genres (e.g. "elegy" expands into the "elegiac", the pastoral form into the pastoral mode)'.[20] Applying this to the concluding thoughts of this thesis, it can be suggested that fantasy, as a genre, is moving into fantasy as a mode. This notion is not new, as Attebery discusses this very distinction in 'Genre, Formula, Mode', but it does say something about the current state of the genre's evolution and transformation of functions, and its relationship to fiction. Like the gothic, which went from a genre to mode, this shift allows and accounts for the

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[20] Alastair Fowler, 'Transformations of Genre', in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by David Duff (Essex: Pearson Education, 2000), p. 232.

changes – particularly subversive ones – being observed. In addition, if metafiction

is also considered a mode (a narrative mode, in this case), then metafantasy's

inevitable inception is understood; as the genre of fantasy, operating as an inherent

narrative mode, transformed into a mode of fiction – i.e., a fictional mode of a

narrative mode – its doubleness and its ability to subvert what are considered to be

its generic features is then explained. This also accounts for how metafantasy does

not need to share all of the generic features of fantasy, but is nonetheless informed

by its modal features.

When discussing fantasy as a mode, Attebery describes it as 'means of investigating

the way we use fictions to construct reality itself.' Here, Attebery is not so much

acknowledging the way the genre inherently does this because of its necessary

structure and stance toward reality and story, but the way the genre is moving

toward the metafantastic dynamics explored here.[21] As mode, however, fantasy loses

many of its restrictive historical connotations (as a modern genre) for it includes,

Attebery posits, all literary manifestations of the imagination's ability to soar above

the merely possible'.[22] Attebery further defines mode as 'a way of doing

something… a stance, a position on the world as well as a means of portraying it'.[23]

He places this mode amongst Northrop Frye's literary modes as the contrary but not

opposing pole to mimetic literature, demonstrating, as Chapter One also addressed,

fantasy's constant metafictive stance in relation to both mimetic fiction and accepted

perceptions of reality. But because fantasy, from this modal perspective, is broader,

encompassing non-literary forms and challenging many of the questions that are

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[21] His citing of Calvino, Borges, Piers Anthony and even Robert E. Howard should be noted. (Brian Attebery, 'Fantasy as Genre, Formula, Mode', in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. by David Sandner (London: Praeger, 2004) pp. 293-309 (p. 294)).
[22] Attebery, p. 294.
[23] Attebery, p. 295.

asked of the generic and formulaic aspects of fantasy, it can be used to address how metafantasies have been successfully incorporating non-literary fantasy devices metafictionally in order to suggest either even subtler iterations of the genre, or subvert it entirely. This is possible because, in the narrative sense, metafiction is exactly this: a stance (a commentary, a mirror, a statement about narrative from the location of the narrative).

Nonetheless, the divide between mode and genre has plagued genre theory for decades, particularly because of, as Genette puts it, 'erroneous attribution'.[24] Instead, Genette strongly adheres to genres being literary categories, and modes being linguistic categories, wherein the former is bound by thematic and aesthetic forms, and the latter by language. In general, then, mode is used to denote, as Duff summarises, both 'the manner of representation or enunciation in a literary work' – this is Genette's position, as well as Attebery's, who refers to 'fantasy as mode' as a way 'of telling stories' – and 'literary categories'.[25] In any case, as a strict manner of representation and literary language, metafiction theory finds correspondences with such modal descriptions. Waugh, for instance, in reference to Bakhtin's 'process of relativization as the "dialogic" potential of the novel' argues that metafiction 'makes this potential explicit and […] foregrounds the essential mode of all fictional language'.[26] She further elaborates that metafictional narratives can '[provide] a critique of commonly accepted cultural forms of representation, from *within* those very modes of representation'.[27]

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[24] Gérard Genette, 'The Architext', in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. by David Duff, pp. 210-218 (p. 212).

[25] David Duff, ed., *Modern Genre Theory*, p. xv; Attebery, p. 295.

[26] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 5.

[27] Waugh, p. 8. Italics in original.

This raises several questions; first, is fantasy also a metafictional mode, or is it a metafictional genre because it is bound within (or informed by) a metafictional mode of representation? Second, where does a modal approach of fantasy and metafiction leave metafantasy? It may well be that fantasy, in being generically identified and regarded as metafiction, can be used modally by metafantasy. For Attebery, fantasy as genre is the middle ground between fantasy as mode and fantasy as formula, yet as seen, metafantasy, in presupposing fantasy as genre, is subsequently free to deconstruct its formulaic tendencies and challenge it modally – challenge its very stance and manner of representation of the fantastic. Moreover, if Fowler's model is applied here, it could be that metafantasy is transforming fantasy, or rather, readerly and critical perceptions of and responses to fantasy as genre into more of a 'modal entity'.

In other words, though fantasy as mode, as Attebery argues, is both broader and historically unbound in relation to fantasy as genre, metafantasy's doubly metafictive stance toward fantasy might be rendering fantasy more into this modal form precisely because market and critical reactions have established a more or less coherent (that is, 'fuzzy') genre set. It also accounts for metafantasy's seeming ease with and attraction toward genre-mixing; if, as Attebery and Genette comment, 'the fantastic' is the literary mode of fantasy – a category which is much broader, intangible, and fuzzier than fantasy as a modern genre – then all is essentially fair game (especially considering metafiction's playful impulses). These questions and problems, however, necessitate a far more in-depth analysis than this thesis can offer.

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