

# The fantasy of the dark materials

[Literature](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Fantasy is so widespread in the early literature of every culture- from Egypt, Persia, to Rome and west- that it is impossible to separate it from the greatest fairy tales and ancient legends (Mathews 2). However it is the Romantic Movement's worship of the imagination and the growing public interest in national folktales that led to the writing of the first true children fantasies by such writers as Lewis Carroll, and George Mac Donald (Manlove 167). William Morris and George Mac Donald are the first ones who start writing fantasy as a modern literary genre in mid-nineteenth century (Mathews 16).

Morris publishes his first fantasy stories in 1856 and Mac Donald's novel *Phantases* appears in 1858. Shortly after Morris and Mac Donald begin their fantasy writing in 1850s, the publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* extends the possibility of this type of fiction by introducing a kind of children book which even attracts the grown-up's fully attention (17). Since then lots of other books as children's fantasies are published: Hans Christian Anderson's "The Snow Queen", and Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*. Therefore, the children's literature has proven to be an enduring influence on adult fantasy (17).

The first step for entering the territory of fantasy is to find out its definition. To clarify which kind of work can be called a fantasy has been always the matter of argument and challenge. The important point is to decide where the border between fantasy and reality should be drawn.

Generally speaking, most critics believe fantasy is a kind fiction that evokes wonder, mystery, or magic (1). So, as it is concerned with magic, we can

easily conclude that it does not require any logic and reason to explain about the actions of the characters and the twists of the plot (3).

Although this approach toward defining fantasy is acceptable, it is not convincing. It is a very broad definition and can include many realistic works in which there is a small trace of magic or mystery (4). So, it is better to peruse this subject matter through three different perspectives which are presented by three influential masters of fantasy's theories.

### Tzvetan Todorov and Fantasy

Todorov argues that fantasy's fundamental departure from realism creates a moment of hesitation in which one cannot determine whether a narrative work belongs to the realm of "uncanny" or to the realm of the "marvelous" (Aichele 3, Mathews 3). The reader of the story always comes across this moment of hesitation:

"The fantastic therefore implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the events narrated" (qtd. in Aichele 4)

This type of reader who confronts this problematic choice is not the same historical reader. Instead, he is an implied reader (Aichele 4). The actual reader can never be identified by to the implied reader. However, insofar as the actual reader is unable to identify with the implied reader, there may never be a moment of hesitation, and the actual reader may entirely miss the fantasy (4).

According to Todorov, the fantastic is built upon the ambiguity of genres (5). In other words, what his analyses suggest is that the fantastic is not a genre at all, but rather it lies in the impossibility of identifying certain stories in terms of generic reality to which they refer.

" In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature confronting an apparently supernatural phenomenon." (qtd. in Aichele 5, qtd. in Horri 67)

As far as Todorov's ideas are concerned, this ambiguous genre is located between two other distinct genres: Uncanny and Marvelous. The Uncanny presents the bizarre events happening in the everyday world. Although they seem to be very strange and odd, later they are justifiable by some natural laws and scientific rules. The Marvelous presents a supernatural world as though it were real and waiting to be discovered somewhere in this universe (Aichele 5, Horri 61-63).

Fantasy is none of the above. It is near belief, that is, it is neither belief nor disbelief. It can be described as those moments when the reader is unable to distinguish and decide what is real (Aichele 5). However, this moment cannot last forever. Finally, the reader has to make his/her mind: whether these extraordinary events are explainable in terms of natural laws (Uncanny), or they all come from a supernatural world which is portrayed as if it is real (Marvelous). The moment the reader discerns his/her position and turns

toward one of these distinct genres, fantasy "destroys" itself (6). In other words, fantasy sustains up to the moment hesitation exists.

Marvelous Marvelous Fantasy Uncanny Fantasy Uncanny

(Horri 66)

Eric Rabkin and Fantasy

Although Rabkin and Todorov have many points in common and Rabkin expresses his admiration for Todorov's analyses, they have got different approaches toward considering fantasy as a genre. So, they present different definitions of it too.

While Todorov does not accept Fantasy as a genre and use two other distinct genres (Uncanny, and Marvelous) for its defining and locating, Rabkin accepts it as a complete genre in itself, and believes that it will come into existence when fantastic reversal (whatever that sounds odd and strange in comparison to the real world) is exhaustively central to the narrative (Aichele 10). To state it in his words:

"When linguistic perspectives continually shift within a given text, that is, when the ground rules of the narrative world are subjected to repeated reversals, we have fantasy." (qtd. in 10)

J. R. R. Tolkien and Fantasy

Tolkien provides one of the earliest, clearest and most influential critical descriptions of fantasy. He describes it as an older and higher form of imagination that is liberated from the dominance of reality. He asserts that <https://assignbuster.com/the-fantasy-of-the-dark-materials/>

fantasy probably includes the events and facts which are not going to be found in the real or primary world. But the essential point is that we as readers admit this world's being mixed by bizarre atmosphere (Mathews 56).

He observes fantasy as an escape from reality and conventional contemporary real world into the world of imagination in which talking animals and odd creatures are waiting for us to help us to investigate the rules of the new or secondary world (56-57).