

OTHERS AND SPACES IN FANTASY OTHERWORLDS

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ABSTRACT

Fantasy is a literary genre in which authors freely construct entire worlds to suit their own ideological purposes. These Otherworlds often have implications for identity construction that need to be considered within the reading contexts of multicultural societies. In particular, awareness of the possible ways in which these narratives instantiate the difference between dominant and marginal cultures in their constructions of Self (subject identities) and Other is crucial. In this article I investigate the function of representations of the Other, specifically the Oriental Other, in fantasy literature for children. It is argued that fantasy literature, which is a genre that is intimately involved in the constructedness of strange and familiar categories, provides a useful venue for studying the reflection of the relationship between dominant and marginal cultures in literature.

KEYWORDS

orientalism, fantasy, postcolonialism, identity, children's literature

1 INTRODUCTION

Frances Hodgson Burnett's children's story *The secret garden* ([1911]1983:9) begins by telling us that its protagonist, Mary Lennox, was born in India and that she has never seen 'familiarily anything but the dark faces of her Ayah and the other native servants'. Nevertheless, it is soon made clear in this story that India is not home to Mary, something that she instinctively understands:

'You are going to be sent home,' Basil said to her, 'at the end of the week. And we're glad of it.'

‘I am glad of it too,’ answered Mary. ‘Where is home?’
 ‘She doesn’t know where home is!’ said Basil, with seven-year-old scorn. ‘It’s England, of course...’ (Burnett, [1911]1983:14).

At the same time, although England is ‘home’, this does not mean that England cannot be experienced by Mary as something unknown and new. Mary is introduced first as an arrival, an explorer of an unknown space (Kutzer 2000:57) – a crucial position that depends upon India as a *familiar* space. She then encounters England as a series of interlinked secrets, a labyrinth of mysteries, the most important of which is clearly the discovery of the forbidden titular garden. The plot of the story is thus driven by a pulse of discovery that serves as the basis of the novel’s suspense and emotional development. India, although described as familiar (because it is where the protagonist was born and is the only place she knows), remains vague and obscure, discernible for the most part only in the dark, silent faces of Indian servants. The result is that, curiously, this is a story about discovering ‘home’ – that which ought to be the essence of what is familiar.

Burnett’s tale of a little girl who travels to a new world, which is in fact her own world, approaches what JRR Tolkien sees as one of the essential functions of fantasy literature: Recovery. ‘Recovery ...’ writes Tolkien ([1964]2001:57), ‘is a re-gaining – regaining of a clear view ... so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity – from possessiveness.’ In telling her story from Mary’s point of view, Burnett effectively strips her native English setting of this kind of ‘familiarity’, making it ‘strange’ and thereby restoring to it a wonder as of things seen for the first time. Through Mary’s eyes, England becomes the familiar recovered as strange, a world whose Otherness has been rediscovered. And the Otherness of the Orient plays a vital and curious role in this estranging process.

In this article, I focus on the significance of representations of the Other, specifically the Oriental Other, in fantasy literature for children. The element of Recovery, which Tolkien argues is a special feature of fantasy literature, is the key to my decision to study such representations specifically within this genre. *The secret garden*, although a realistic children’s story, has been used as a point of departure because it highlights the significance of Recovery for representations of the Orient in children’s literature specifically, and for literature in general.

2 RECOVERY AND THE ORIENT AS OTHER

2.1 ADVERSARIAL DUALITY

India, the Oriental space in this story, is far more than simply a plot device with which to position the protagonist as an explorer within the text. Mary’s journey from India imposes a shape on the very value system of the story. This contradicts Hourihan’s assertion that

The enormous and enduring popularity of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* ... shows that children are able to construct satisfying meanings from stories which work symbolically, with a structure that focuses on a single place, and in which the essential movement of the plot is inward, rather than forward (1997:49).

Hourihan (1997:46) sees the forward movement, a common feature in narrative structures, as indicative of a strong sense of linear progression, which enacts and confirms the Western reader's pre-existing sense of superiority about cultural identity. Essentially what develops in these texts is a structure of adversarial duality, that is, a structure of duality that is based on conflict (Hourihan 1997:3). Heroes encounter enemies that are systematically vanquished, since the hero always embodies the superior half of these dualisms (1997:2), which ascribe to the enemies of the hero all those qualities which are to be rejected or dismissed as evil or inferior. Inferiority and/or evil in these texts is thus equated with what is Other to the hero, and to his culture (Hourihan 1997:32), and the Other is therefore understood as a constructed entity. As the hero meets with success after success, the narrative offers no challenge to the claims of superiority made for his culture, inscribing an assertion of the ego within the text that is instrumental in the encoding of adversarial duality. Hourihan proposes that *The secret garden* demonstrates the dispensability of this structure by suggesting that movement in the story, focusing on the titular garden, enacts an internal development, rather than the confrontational development of cultural identity at the expense of constructed Others.

Hourihan's (1997) choice of *The secret garden* as an example of a story that does not encode linear progression is erroneous, however, as it misses the point that *The secret garden* is, in fact, crucially shaped by a journey: Mary's journey to England from India. Although this journey takes place at the beginning of the novel, and, as I have noted, evokes India with barely any detail, it sets the terms for the spiritual journey which Mary goes through in her discovery of the garden. Kutzer (2000:59) argues that 'Mary must play at colonizing and domesticating the wild garden in order that she may recolonise herself into English ways ... In attempting to resurrect the garden, she resurrects her English self.' There is thus a clear forward movement inscribed in this story, which enacts a model of linear progression similar to those Hourihan identifies in hero tales. It is not, however, a progression of vanquished enemies, but a steady journey of rediscovery which nevertheless presupposes the moral inferiority of the Oriental identity. Recovery here, as in Tolkien's definition of fantasy, revitalises the familiar; but exactly how is this accomplished?

The secret garden is fundamentally a redemption tale, chronicling the physical and spiritual regeneration of Mary Lennox. The opening of the novel, which takes place in India, makes great use of impenetrability and chaos to project a sense of inscrutability and profound alienation. Descriptions of India are hurried and vague, emphasising an intense heat and haziness which repels interest, the opaque density of which compares starkly with the cool clarity of English characters and settings. The Orient in this story therefore functions not so much as an inverse reflection, defining European identity by

contrast, as it does as a dark mirror, in which the sober vividness of English identity emerges as a picture filling in an empty space. This effect is aided not so much by the shift in setting itself as by Burnett's treatment of the material. India is vaguely defined, while not enticingly mysterious, until the chaos of the plague necessitates Mary's hasty departure. In contrast England is described in detail, revealed in stages to Mary as she penetrates the mysteries of the house and the garden. In reflecting Mary's viewpoint, these settings work to construct aspects of her character, for example her self-involvement and spiritual retardation. During the course of the novel, Mary is transformed from a sickly, self-absorbed child into a healthy, pretty girl who is also capable of nurturing others. Themes of discovery and redemption go hand in hand in this way as Mary begins to take an interest in things outside herself, thereby becoming less selfish. But it is England and the secrets at home which allow for this change, not the mysteries of India. In this way the novel is driven by what I have called a 'pulse of discovery', which quickens in the English setting and culminates in the revelation of the secret of the garden. The garden then functions simultaneously as the primary redemptive space of healing and growth, and as the antithesis of the Orient. As Hillel (2003:59) notes:

Discourses of racism and redemption intersect here; Mary needs to be deorientalized in order to be good enough to function as a redeemer But the garden itself functions as a symbol of deorientalizing; Mary learns to appreciate English flora and fauna and to work in a way she never had to do in India, surrounded as she was by servants.

This reading of *The Secret Garden* raises some interesting questions about the significance of journeys, no matter how marginal, in the shaping of value systems in stories. This is doubly so in the case of children's literature, with the act of 'leaving home' being so closely tied, at least in Western societies, to the end of childhood itself (Butler 2006:104). However, what is even more interesting is the way Burnett manipulates 'strange' and 'familiar' spaces, reorganising the values surrounding them and reworking their traditional connections to the Orient and the West. Burnett's tale of empire has been reworked so that the fantasy of discovering the unknown has become a fantasy for recovering the known.

Far more common, especially in the adventure stories of the period, is the opposite. According to Kutzer (2000:2) in 'adventure fiction, we appear still to be in the real world, but one that provides much more excitement and exoticism than can be found in dreary and domesticated England.' In *The secret garden*, however, while Burnett does not deny that India is a land of wonders, she is at pains to emphasise that they are wonders without spiritual value. For example, Mary tells the gardener, Ben Weatherstaff, that flowers in India 'grow up in a night' (Burnett [1911]1983:51), and Indian flowers are contrasted with the English flowers in the secret garden that require the attention and nurturing Mary provides and that are a source of excitement and healing to her. Likewise the housemaid, Martha, is amazed that Mary has never enjoyed the simple, wholesome pleasure of a skipping-rope, and had never seen one in India 'for all they've got elephants and tigers and camels ...' (Burnett [1911]1983:56).

2.2 MANIPULATION OF THE STRANGE AND THE FAMILIAR

The different uses made of strange and familiar space in children's stories highlight the importance of the journey in the children's novel. But more importantly, they alert us to the fact of the controlled nature of our response to these categories, the manipulation of which holds powerful implications. They reveal the functionality of representations of the Other, and the significance of such representations for identity construction, for example the recovery of English identity at the expense of the Orient in *The secret garden*.

Fantasy is a genre that also renegotiates categories that we have constructed as 'strange' and 'familiar', and its values are significantly linked to the values it attaches to these. Frequently using narrative strategies remarkably similar to those in *The secret garden*, it is a literature which reorganises values surrounding these qualities, offering Otherness conditioned by the narrative devices peculiar to the genre. It is thus a genre that is intimately involved with the constructedness of these categories. As such, fantasy provides a unique vantage point from which to examine the way such Otherworlds are positioned imaginatively and textually in English-language stories.

Jackson (1981:53) writes:

In its broadest sense, fantastic literature has always been concerned with revealing and exploring the interrelations of the 'I' and the 'not-I', of self and other. Within a supernatural economy, or a magical thought mode, otherness is designated as otherworldly, supernatural, as being above, or outside, the human

Fantasy is thus usefully understood as a genre fundamentally conditioned by Otherness, but it is an Otherness that expands the limits of what we know about ourselves and the worlds we inhabit. Whereas in realist fiction the Other is likely to take the shape of a different culture, in fantasy the familiar itself is made Other, transfigured by that which we know to be impossible (Attebery 1992:15). This defining characteristic of 'Otherness' has led to the genre being accused of promoting escapism (Lewis 1980:214), or of being specially designated for children to the extent that Swinfen (1984:1) comments that fantasy writers 'have too often been obliged to publish as children's writers'. However, far from being escapist, fantasy distorts reality or changes it deliberately in order to accomplish a particular design. It is a deeply complex mode of art showing varying effects, depending on the author and each particular work. Accordingly, many different theories have been formulated concerning the function and value of fantasy literature.

3 THE FUNCTION AND VALUE OF FANTASY LITERATURE

3.1 ENCHANTMENT

For Tolkien ([1964]2001:47), the author of one of the most successful and influential fantasy works in the English language, *The Lord of the rings* (1955), the definitive feature of fantasy is the aspect of ‘sub-creation’. Authors of fantasy, according to Tolkien, are not simply the creators of random, senseless visions; and the success of a good fantasy is not dependent on the degree to which it produces ‘strangeness’, but on the extent to which it produces an indescribable feeling which Tolkien calls ‘enchantment’. Thus, Tolkien ([1964]2001:22, 49) argues, ‘anyone... can say *the green sun*’: the creative powers inherent in language, which gave us no less a potent spell than that of the adjective, allow for this. It is the ability to create a world which the mind can enter, a world in which we can not only imagine a green sun, but can in fact ‘believe’ in it on another, secondary level, which is the key to skilful fantasy. Such fantasies result in true ‘Secondary Worlds’, and produce ‘Secondary Belief’ (Tolkien [1964]2001:53). And true Secondary Worlds are Otherworlds in their entirety, though everything in them may not be fantastic. Everything in them, including things which we know to exist – ‘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’ (Tolkien [1964]2001:9) – are touched by fantasy, because they are the things we are seeing while enchanted by the craft of the fantasist (i.e. in the pages of a fantasy novel).

It is important to note that Tolkien ([1964]2001:13) distinguishes such fantasy from traveller’s tales, even though they ‘report marvels’, because ‘they are marvels to be seen in this mortal world in some region of our own time and space; distance alone conceals them.’ In other words the marvels of the Otherworlds present in our own realities, those worlds which are strange for cultural reasons, cannot produce the same enchantment. Their strangeness can be perceived, without undergoing a change within oneself, merely by resting one’s eyes on them.

3.2 DESIRE AND RECOVERY

The feeling of being enchanted is the key to what Tolkien ([1964]2001) sees as one of the most important functions of fantasy, and to one of the questions he initially attempted to answer when writing his essay: what is the value of fantasy? In connection with the idea of enchantment, there are two interrelated notions which need to be considered. First, Tolkien ([1964]2001:41) sees fantasy tales as being essentially concerned with desire: ‘If they [awaken] *desire*, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they [succeed].’ Awakening desire is the thrust of Tolkien’s meaning when he uses the word ‘enchantment’, which for him signifies primarily what he calls ‘primordial desires’, satisfied through the fantastic possibilities inherent in the Otherness of fantasy:

One of these desires is to survey the depths of space and time. Another is ... to hold communion with other living things. A story may thus deal with the satisfaction of these desires, with or without the operation of either machine or magic, and in proportion as it succeeds it will approach the quality and have the flavour of fairy-story (Tolkien ([1964]2001:13)).

Such primordial desires are linked to a profound desire for the Other. But this is not the only sense in which Tolkien sees fantasy as satisfying desire. The Secondary Worlds of fantasy, enchanting everything within them while containing what cannot be attained (i.e. the fantastic); also invest the common and the ordinary with a sense of Otherness; in enchanting the visitor they inevitably enchant all that is visited. Thus fantasy effects Recovery, restoring to the ordinary and the common their inherent Otherness. According to Tolkien ([1964]2001:59), this reminds us that all we have is ‘dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more [ours] than they are [us]’. Essentially, this means that fantasy frees the familiar from ‘triteness’, the perception of the familiar as uninteresting and insignificant. This triteness is the cost of ‘appropriation’: as Tolkien ([1964]2001:58) says, ‘They are like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them.’ Thus in fantasy, when we desire the Other, we desire that which is ours already; by freeing the familiar of our possessiveness we begin to desire it again.

If we examine *The secret garden*, it is not difficult to see that Recovery, in Tolkien’s very specific sense, is one of the values of the novel, although it is not a fantasy story. Desire is what begins to stir in Mary when she arrives in England and hears about the enticing secret of the garden. And most importantly a sense of enchantment pervades the story’s atmosphere, because of the spiritual change Mary undergoes. Clearly, Tolkien’s insights do not apply to fantasy alone, and by identifying the way Recovery operates in a non-fantasy like *The secret garden*, we can perceive the value of the narrative techniques which fantasy literature foregrounds for all literature, especially when investigating constructions of the Other.

4 THE ORIENT AS OTHERWORLD

Tolkien ([1964]2001:58) himself says that fantasy is not the only means of Recovery, and that a sense of humility is enough. In other words, he acknowledges the operations of Recovery in contexts other than fantasy. However, he believes nothing achieves the release of the familiar from triteness ‘so thoroughly as a fairy-story, a thing built on or about [f]antasy, of which [f]antasy is the core.’ (Tolkien [1964]2001:59) Whether this is true or not, fantasy is, for many reasons, probably the best genre in which to study the renegotiation of values around representations of the Orient. Fantasy is a literature of Otherworlds, and the Orient has historically been one of the most potent Otherworlds of the Western imagination.

According to Edward Said ([1978]1980:1–2):

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.

It is the Orient's position as a contrasting world, a contrasting Other, that makes it so especially significant in fantasy. Firstly, fantasy, because of its sub-creative aspects, necessarily derives much of its technique from the same imaginative processes that Said ([1978]1980:55) identifies as being instrumental in our conception of the Other, other lands, other peoples, other cultures. Such processes essentially involve the imaginative production and discrimination of *space* and play a vital role in the organisation of our world-view:

[T]he universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs' is a way of making geographical distinctions that *can* be entirely arbitrary. I used the word 'arbitrary' here because imaginative geography of the 'our land-barbarian land' variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from 'ours' (Said ([1978]1980:54).

Thus, for Said ([1978]1980:4–5), all spatial designations of strangeness and familiarity (them and us, 'Orient' and 'Occident') are imaginative geographies. Imagining geographies is in a related sense what occurs in the construction of the Secondary Worlds of fantasy. Both processes (the conception of the Other and fantasy construction) involve ideas (values, notions of what makes 'us' different) figured as imaginatively produced and organised space, which necessarily invests the concept of journeys with all sorts of potent meanings and implications.

4.1 LANDSCAPES, QUESTS AND ROMANTICISM

Wood (1986:7) notes that landscapes 'are highly important in Marvellous Secondary Worlds and are closely related to the plot, which frequently consists of journeys, often taking the form of quests.' The landscapes of fantasy are often symbolic, playing vital roles in metaphors and allegories. Fantasy thus provides a useful and rich framework for investigating the operation of imaginative geographies, as well as an interesting vantage point from which to consider such geographies in realist texts. For example, in *The secret garden*, a story about a little girl who rediscovers her national and racial identity, landscape plays an essential role as Mary makes the journey from India to England, symbolising her spiritual journey from Oriental selfishness and despotism to her role as a redeemer and nurturer (Hillel 2003:59). In this story, although not a fantasy tale itself, theories formulated about fantasy, like Tolkien's concept of Recovery, allow

us to view figurations of the Oriental and the familiar space in new ways which impact significantly on our understanding of the way the novel functions.

Secondly, fantasy derives in part from the same thread of the aesthetic which historically has had a significant relationship with European interest in the Orient, namely romanticism. ‘Modern fantasy’, says Rosemary Jackson (1981:4), ‘is rooted in ancient myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance.’ According to Michael Ferber (2005:1–2), *Romauns*, derived from ‘the adverb *Romanice*, ‘in the Roman manner’, was the term

applied to anything written in Gallo-Roman Old French and, even after ‘French’ had replaced it as the name for the language, it remained in use for the typical kind of literature written in it, that is, what we still call ‘romances,’ the tales of chivalry, magic, and love, especially the Arthurian stories.

Gillian Beer (1970:4) describes the history of the romance ‘as a shift from form to quality,’ so that we ‘tend to speak of ‘medieval romances’ but of the ‘Elizabethan romance’ and then of ‘romance in nineteenth century novels,’” the last of which refers to a wider aesthetic movement which characterises what is known as the Romantic period (p. 7). Basically we can see fantasy as a continuation of one thread of an aesthetic divide that begins with the medieval romance. This split essentially hinges, on the one hand, on the impulse to give the imagination free reign, and on the other to render reality in as ‘true’ a way as possible. Attebery (1992: x) writes:

Whereas once upon a time ... storytelling was divided into things that were true – history and things that weren’t – romance – now the division comes at quite another point. Once the realistic novel was invented, it claimed kinship to history and denied its ties to romance. Hence, the gulf opened between histories true or feigned, on the one hand, and fantasies, on the other.

However, romance literature, since at least the time of the crusades, has been ‘affected by the culture of the East, and from the eighteenth century ... particularly by *The Arabian nights*’ (Beer 1970:6). Examples include numerous fictional works by Romantic writers such as Lord Byron (*The giaour* [1813], *The corsair* and its sequel *Lara* [1814]), Thomas Moore (*Lalla Rookh* [1817]) and Robert Southey (*Thalaba the destroyer* [1801] and *The curse of Kehama* [1810]) (Saglia 2005:470–475).

The influence of the *Arabian nights* has also been supremely important to representations of the Orient, especially in children’s literature. This in itself has been a complex development having more to do with the functionality of these representations than with the actual Orient. Stephens and McCallum (1998: 232) note the following:

The process of producing versions of the *Arabian Nights* for young readers has evolved under the influence of the Western metaethic, with little or no recourse to literary traditions in Arabic. In essence, the *Arabian Nights* is constituted by its nineteenth-century translations... and these have richly supplied modern redactors with the exoticism associated with the

Orient, especially spectacle built around foreign settings, magical forces, alien customs and modes of [behaviour], the dealings of kings and sultans, passion, violence, and death.

Today the most obvious link between medieval romances and modern fantasy is the preference for a medieval setting. Thompson (1982:215) writes that in ‘medieval romance the testing of the chivalric ideal takes place in a medieval setting, regardless of the context of the original material’. Thus heroes borrowed from Greek or Roman legend are transformed into nobles from various stages of the Middle Ages demonstrating knightly prowess and the ideals of chivalric behaviour. Similarly Hunt and Lenz (2001:4) note that ‘there has been, since the days of the first real example of a “logically cohesive” alternative world ... a tendency to exploit pseudo-medieval settings.’

In these kinds of fantasies, the Orient as an Otherworld is positioned at a double remove from contemporary reality, which can be instrumental in facilitating the Recovery of the familiar. For example, Stephens and McCallum (1998:230) write that ‘[t]he Orient depicted in the *Arabian Nights* is another medieval fantasy world, already constructed as a fantastic Other by that medieval world itself subsequently reconstructed as a fantastic Other by the modern West.’ By including pseudo-Oriental spaces within fictional worlds structured as pseudo-medieval settings, fantasy writers can position their alternative worlds not only in relation to contemporary reality but also in relation to another Oriental Otherworld. This results in a complex vacillation between the categories of strangeness and familiarity in order to produce Recovery.

The evident fondness for medieval settings also links fantasy literature to an impulse common in children’s literature. Hunt and Lenz (2001:4) argue that in fantasy literature the prevalence of medieval settings ‘suggests a regressive element, a romantic yearning (by adults) for earlier “innocence”, for an alternative world where motivations, actions, needs and gratifications are simpler and more direct than in the desperately complex and subtle real world.’ In a similar vein, Kutzer (2000: xvi) writes: ‘The arcadian paradise of children’s fiction provides an imaginative space where social and cultural disruption is not only impossible, it is barely acknowledged.’

4.2 SPACE AND IDEOLOGY IN THE SECONDARY WORLDS OF FANTASY

This brings me to an essential point, namely that investigating textual constructions of identity tends to involve a preoccupation with imaginative constructions of space, and more specifically with textual figurations of space. Viljoen, Lewis and Van der Merwe (2004:14) expand on this notion of space as follows:

Space in the most abstract, theoretical sense, is pure extension – an open area without boundaries, a limitless expanse, and the contemplation of such a limitless space might seem extremely difficult. But as soon as we inhabit certain spaces, experience them, start telling stories about them, they are transformed into places with boundaries and associated with emotions and meaningful events.

We can distinguish between physical or geographical space and space that has been accommodated into the organised economy of our worldview: demarcated, labelled and invested with meaning. Invariably, the shift from the former to the latter is a narrative process as well as a differentiating one, involving story-telling and generating identity construction. ‘We can thus view the relationship between space and identity as a symbiotic relationship, a mutual dependency creating meaningfulness’ (Viljoen et al 2004:12).

For some authors, most notably CS Lewis, author of *The chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956), the meanings articulated by their Secondary Worlds are transcendental in nature, embodying religious truths (Schakel 2005:28–29). Other authors have used fantasy to express what they believe are truths pertaining to human psychology (Landow 1982:127). However, what these different works have in common is that by deliberately disregarding the reality of material actuality, they direct our attention to the conceptual or ideological assumptions held by the authors. ‘The writer of fantasy goes beyond realism to reveal that we do not live entirely in a world of facts, that we also inhabit a universe of the mind and spirit where the creative imagination is permanently struggling to articulate meaning and values’ (Egoff 1981:81).

However, if fantasy literature is strongly ideological, then fantasy as children’s literature and as a descendent of the Romance represents a nexus of overlapping impulses to idealism that often serves conservative agendas. As Hunt and Lenz (2001:4) suggest, as fantasy literature, children’s fantasy may function as the site of idealised pseudo-medieval constructions of reality. As children’s literature, it often manifests as an arcadian paradise where ‘disruption’ can be ignored (Kutzer 2000: xvi). Frequently, however, what is meant by ‘disruption’ is apparently a dislodging of essentialist constructions of identity, the purpose of which is to preserve the privileged position of the offered subject. However, I do not agree with the view that fantasy is inherently conservative, encoding the simplistic notions of identity which conservatism often implies, any more than I agree with Rosemary Jackson’s characterisation of the genre as a literature of subversion.

To Jackson (1981), fantasies like those of Tolkien and Lewis are in a sense failed fantasies (Attebery 1992:21), precisely because of the tendencies I have just been discussing. According to Jackson (1981:9), they ‘move away from the unsettling implications which are found at the centre of the purely “fantastic”’. Their original impulse may be similar, but they move from it, expelling their desire and frequently displacing it into religious longing and nostalgia.’ Kroeber (1988:7) disagrees with this, saying that ‘Romantic fantasy is not, as Rosemary Jackson thinks, nostalgic,’ and arguing (1988:9–10) that fantasy ‘turns inward rather than backward. Fantasy is a primary form of literary self-reflexivity.’ The answer to this is that fantasy has the immense potential for both self-reflexivity and the conservative nostalgia for a world of simplified identities, and therein lies its immense significance as a site for postcolonial interrogation.

4.3 ORIENTALISM AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

McGillis (2000: xxii) writes that postcolonialism ‘as an activity of mind is quite simply intent on ... liberating the study of literature from traditional and Eurocentric ways of seeing.’ Eurocentric conceptions of identity manifest in literature as an aspect of neocolonialism, identified by McGillis (2000: xxiv) as ‘a renewed drive on the part of the dominant social and cultural forces to maintain their positions of privilege.’

It is this view of identity construction that underlies what Said ([1978]1980:1) identifies as Orientalism, ‘a way [for Europeans] of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience.’ Underlying this, and crucially informing it on all levels, is the imagined contrast between the subject (European) identity and the ‘Orient’ (Said [1978]1980:43). Furthermore, according to Said, the ‘Orient’ itself, defined by its difference from Europe, is an imagined entity, hence the term ‘imaginative geography’. Therefore a problem inherent in Orientalism is that the primary function of the Orient is not to be represented accurately, but to *be* Other, in other words, to subordinate peoples designated as Oriental to the needs of a dominant group for the purposes of self-definition (Said [1978]1980:71). Such styles of thinking ensure that Orientals are defined only in terms of difference, and ‘the result is usually to polarise the distinction – the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western – and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies’ (Said [1978]1980:45).

McGillis (2000: xxiv) makes the following observations on neocolonialism:

In books for children, neocolonialism manifests itself as both a depiction of minority cultures as inveterately other and inferior in some ways to the dominant European culture, or as an appropriation of other cultures – that is, an assimilation of minority cultures into the mainstream way of thinking.

However, if postcolonialism is essentially opposed to the notion that a superior group shapes an inferior group to its own desires and needs, the very identification of such a thing as children’s literature is immediately problematic. Children’s books are, for the most part, written by adults (Kutzer 2000:xv). The identification of children’s literature is based on the ‘assumption that children are an identifiable group that requires a particular kind of text written for it by a superior group’ (Reimer 2000:111). Children’s books are almost always more or less didactic, with adults, whether consciously or unconsciously, conveying morals and values which they deem acceptable to the child audience, in the hope of perpetuating those values (Kutzer 2000: xv). In this sense children’s literature can be understood as a colonised space, and children as a colonised group, a concept that has been explored by Perry Nodelman (1992). Fantasy literature, with its ideology-based alternate realities, provides a useful venue for perceiving this. If fantasy is a genre wherein authors may construct spaces to reflect ideology, then children’s fantasy can be understood as a way for authors to move children into a space particularly constructed to project ideology and thus, already colonised.

5 THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: A COLONISED SPACE

The clearest example of a fantasy depicting a constructed space colonised by conservative ideology is probably *The chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956), a series of seven books by CS Lewis. Imaginative fiction, and fantasy in particular, Lewis believed, could be used to ‘train the child into having correct moral emotions so that when he grows rational he will be prepared to recognize and live out ethical principles’ (Hilder 2003:12). Further explaining this concept, Hilder (2003:8) writes that it is ‘one thing for the teacher to rationally impart a vision of the Good. ... But it’s quite another thing to have readers fall in love with the Good and want it.’ By engaging the imagination, fantasy allows readers to love the Good by embodying virtue in positive imaginative experience.

There is thus an explicitly didactic impulse in the *Chronicles*. ‘The little human animal’, Lewis says, ‘will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting and hateful’ (Hilder 2003:14). The material of Lewis’s Otherworld is therefore designed both to provoke and demand strong emotional responses in readers, and this has significant implications for Lewis’s deployment of the Orient.

Many of Lewis’s ideas about the function and importance of fantasy echo the ideas outlined in Tolkien’s essay ‘On Fairy-Stories’, an essay which Lewis (1980:212) avowedly admired. Most importantly Lewis concurs with Tolkien in the matter of Recovery: that fantasy has a co-dependent and inextricable connection to reality, and that it can be instrumental in helping us to see our world in a new and enriched light. Since Lewis is concerned with reigniting a sense of appreciation for the world his intended child audience inhabits, he is tellingly selective about which elements he uses to give material shape to the negative and positive aspects of his Otherworld, which has relevant implications for his construction of a ‘moral geography’ (Wood 1986:21).

5.1 LEWIS’S MORAL GEOGRAPHY

Borrowing the medieval worldview in his creation of a Secondary World informs Lewis’s structure of a moral geography, in which the constructed spaces reflect certain moral stances. Narnia, the focus of Lewis’s narrative, is depicted as the centre of its world. Likewise, Zambreno (2005:259) notes that in ‘medieval maps ... Jerusalem is depicted as the [centre] of the inhabited world’. ‘Substituting [the West and East for] a North-South distinction’ (Stephens & McCallum 1998:247) allows Lewis to locate Aslan’s country in the utter East, ‘which is where the Medieval Model locates the Earthly Paradise’, while ‘the forces of evil exist in the [North] and the [South], the latter containing the regions of hyper-sensuality and hedonism’ (Wood 1986:21).

The Oriental space in the *Chronicles* is represented by the country of Calormen, which lies to the South of Narnia beyond its neighboring ally Archenland and across the harsh expanses of a desert. Its function in the narrative is instrumental in the construction of

an ideal subject identity because of its clear contrast to Narnia, which is facilitated by its narrative position. The narrative position of the Orient as represented by Lewis is significant on many levels, involving not only its spatial location in Lewis's Secondary World but also how and when we are meant to encounter it. This is also true of Narnia itself. To achieve these effects, Lewis uses the narrative strategies of a particular category of fantasy.

5.2 PORTAL-QUEST NARRATIVES

Specifically, Lewis's narrative conforms to what Mendlesohn (2008: xix) categorises as the 'portal fantasy', in which 'a fantastic world [is] entered through a portal'. This kind of fantasy has certain characteristics that particularly suit Lewis's narrative, one of the most important of which is its ability to sustain a sense of wonder. According to Mendlesohn (2008:2), it is characterised by the protagonist's move 'from a mundane life ... to direct contact with the fantastic' and 'much quest fantasy...adopts the structure and rhetorical strategies of the portal fantasy: it denies the taken for granted and positions both protagonist and reader as naïve'. This naïve position of the protagonist is, in part, necessary to the operations of Recovery in the narrative, in that comprehending a Secondary World's wonder involves its presentation as new and entirely Other.

A sense of wonder is crucial to the operation of Lewis's didactic strategies, because it is instrumental in making readers *feel* correct moral emotions rather than simply learn lessons. 'Fantasy,' Mendlesohn (2008:5) notes, 'relies on a moral universe: it is less an argument with the universe than a sermon on the way things should be, a belief that the universe should yield to moral precepts. This belief is most true of portal-quest narratives.' In the Chronicles, Narnia is held up as an ideal version of the world from which Lewis's English protagonists come. The supernatural means by which it is reached and its fairy-tale qualities only serve to enhance the appeal of elements which the children recognise from their own world. However, Narnia is in many ways richer than England because of 'the spiritual experience which [it] offers' (Wood 1986:27). Lewis wishes to awaken in his readers a desire for this spiritually richer place, because it stands as a metaphor for a spiritually enriched state, which readers are then invited to take back with them to the frame world, facilitating the Recovery of a refreshed perspective of the Primary World. Using the narrative strategies of the portal fantasy allows Lewis to intensify this desire by contrasting Narnia with various frame worlds.

5.3 THE FUNCTION OF FRAME WORLDS

Frames are described by Attebery (1992:66) as 'narrative devices that establish a relationship between the fantasy world and our own while at the same time separating the two'. However, Mendlesohn (2008:2) suggests that the frame world constitutes any space with which the protagonist is familiar and which she or he leaves to make direct contact with the fantastic. In the Chronicles, Lewis's frame worlds also stand as representations of all that Lewis felt was wrong with the modern world around him. The

frame world's contrast with Narnia is always present, much as India is always present in the form of memory throughout *The secret garden*, emphasising England's identity by its otherness. In this sense the frame world is not necessarily the Primary World, but may be any space that is familiar to the protagonist, including those within the Otherworld.

In *The horse and his boy* (1954), which takes place in Lewis's Otherworld with no transition between it and England, Calormen takes the position as the frame world. *The horse and his boy* tells the story of Shasta, who has been raised as a Calormene fisherman's son, but, unknown to him, is in fact Cor, the son of the King of Archenland. Archenland is a country which neighbours Narnia and is similar to Narnia in almost all respects. The Archenland identity can thus be seen as an extension of the ideal identity that Narnia represents. Although Shasta is an inhabitant of the Otherworld, his encounter with Narnia conforms to the portal-quest fantasy structure: he leaves his familiar surroundings (Calormen) to make contact with the fantastic. Just as Narnia embodies a spiritually enriched state designed to invoke longing in readers, Calormen represents the spiritually impoverished state that Lewis saw in 'modern culture, a culture that was successful in marginalising, and almost in ostracising, Christianity' (Schakel 2005:107).

The journey which Shasta makes from Calormen to Narnia thus serves as a metaphor for the transformation which Lewis wants to encourage readers to go through. Like Mary's journey from India to England in *The secret garden*, it reflects 'a journey of redemption and self-discovery' (Bumbaugh 2005:252). In order to depict the desirability of this transformation, Lewis uses some strategies similar to those in *The secret garden*, deploying the Orient to create a vacuum of unfulfilment which anticipates Narnia's wholesomeness and spiritual enrichment.

The most important of these strategies is Lewis's depiction of Calormen as being mundane and familiar, and his emphasis on Shasta's dissatisfaction with his home. In contrast 'Narnia and the North' is invested with mystery and Shasta desires to go there because it represents possibility as well as escape (Lewis [1954]2001b:12). The appeal of Narnia is further enhanced by the fact that the fantasy elements, most notably the Talking Beasts, which populate the North, do not exist in Calormen. Thus Calormen does not inspire the wonder that Lewis ascribed to a spiritually enriched state. The lack of these elements, for Lewis, both mark its spiritual impoverishment and link it to the modern world.

However, unlike the other morally degraded spaces in the Chronicles, Calormen is an extreme and essentialised embodiment of the vice Lewis saw in modernity, epitomised in the Calormene practice of slavery. Although slavery can be associated with the ancient past, in the Chronicles it is portrayed as the most extreme form of an over-rationalised view of reality, since it involves seeing people only in terms of use. In this way Lewis portrays it as the eventual consequence of ways of thinking that are essential to modernity, which is made clear by the arguments made in favour of its continuation in *The voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952). In answer to Caspian's demand that the slave

trade be stopped, Gumpas replies: ‘But that would be putting the clock back.... Have you no idea of progress, of development?’ (Lewis [1952]2001a:70).

Calormen differs from all the frame worlds in the Chronicles in that there is no suggestion anywhere in the Chronicles of a time in which it was a more positive place. The Calormenes are first mentioned in *The voyage of the Dawn Treader* where they are described thus: ‘The Calormen have dark faces and long beards. They wear flowing robes and orange-coloured turbans, and they are a wise, wealthy, courteous, cruel and ancient people’ (Lewis 2001c [1952]: 73). However, no explanation of its origins or how it came to be a cruel, slave-owning empire is ever given. Its purpose in the Chronicles is simply to represent everything that Narnia is not.

An important indication of this is the difference Lewis makes to the quest structure in *The horse and his boy*. In the Chronicles, conforming to the pattern identified by Joseph Campbell ([1949]1968), quests are usually circular, ending with the protagonist returning home enriched by the lessons and spiritual growth acquired on the journey. However, the quest to reach Narnia in *The horse and his boy* is linear, and neither Shasta nor his companions are meant to return to Calormen, which thus comes to represent an irredeemable space that stands as the ultimate contrast to Narnia. Rather than journeying to Narnia in order to recover a sense of wonder and humility to take back to Calormen, Shasta journeys there to recover the essential nobility of his true identity as a prince of Archenland. Like Mary, he must leave all traces of the Oriental behind him in order to be redeemed and thus recover his true self.

The implications for identity construction in *The chronicles of Narnia* raise several questions that are pertinent to a postcolonial context. The most important of these is: to what extent do the fictional geographies of fantasy literature reflect imaginative geographies in Said’s sense? By this I am referring chiefly to the designation of identities to rigid spaces capable of generating categories such as Orient/Other and Western/Self.

6 CONCLUSION

In this paper it has been my express intention to demonstrate the value of studying the representation of the Other in fantasy literature, specifically in children’s fantasy literature. Fantasy literature foregrounds the constructedness of categories such as ‘strange’ and ‘familiar’ and thus provides a useful framework for investigating the ways in which we imaginatively organise space and convert it into meaning. Particularly interesting is Tolkien’s concept of Recovery, which illuminates new ways of perceiving the functionality of the Other in both fantasy and non-fantasy narratives. Using *The chronicles of Narnia* as an example, in which a representation of the Other has been clearly determined by its usefulness as a contrasting Other-space, has allowed me to explore these operations at its most problematic.

In light of the strong didactic impulse in the Chronicles, it is possible to see Lewis’s Otherworld as a space for colonising children in the sense that the spaces within this

Otherworld are designed specifically to mould values and attitudes. These spaces are instrumental in the construction of subject and other identities, counter to the aim of a postcolonial discourse which is to promote a fluid view of identity in children's literature. At the least, the *Chronicles* demonstrate that the fictional universes of fantasy do not necessarily facilitate an escape from the prejudices that so frequently underlie conservative ideology.

Awareness of these issues is particularly crucial in the reading contexts of multicultural societies. How do children precluded from the subject identity constructed by fantasy stories like *The chronicles of Narnia* internalise these identities? Hourihan (1997:44) comments as follows:

They see human beings like themselves depicted as unimportant and inferior, and sometimes as evil. But as they read they must participate in the hero's perspective and share the feelings of the narrator towards these characters. Thus they are taught to despise themselves, to collude in the construction of their own inferiority rather than to rebel against being so labeled.

On the other hand, how do fantasies affect young readers to whom the subject identity applies? McGillis (2000:xxiv) writes that 'neocolonial enterprises are, in part, a reaction to what we now refer to as multicultural societies.' The simple identities in so many fantasy narratives, with their clear designations of space and culture, are, in a real sense, no longer reflected in multicultural societies. These fantasies are, however, very capable of providing an easy and desirable means of reconstructing rigid categories of identity that operate on the basis of exclusion and contrast.

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