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## Fantasy and Reality

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Panel: Fantasy & Reality

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## Fantasy and Reality

Let's begin with a story in Chuang Tzu's *For the All Things*. "Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzu, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Tzu. Soon I awakened, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man. Between a man and a butterfly there is necessarily a distinction. The transition is called the transformation of material things."

This story is often cited as an example for the confusion or the mixture between reality and fantasy. Even when we are not sleeping, we can imagine escaping far away beyond this real world. We can transcend from this world to that dream fantasy by imagination. Like this, I think that literature is the result of a desire to transform the real world through the tool of imagination. According to Lacan, literature is the way to try to find out 'the alter ego.'

But now we must consider how the imagination is different from the fantasy. In the preface of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge tried to put an emphasis on the value of the imagination, and regarded fantasy as a bad literary tool. Such an opinion stands on the prior condition that the imagination is different from fantasy completely, and that he can divide them actually. But because they are all results of the same mental process, we cannot distinguish the imagination from the fantasy, nor determine which is more valuable. We just get a hint that the imagination must lie on the reality, and that the fantasy must be careful not to contain the unreliable ground.

As shown in the Coleridge's case, though romanticism tried to reject fantasy, 'romantic escape' means not the overcoming, but the abandoning of reality. For all that, in the realism which was followed by romanticism, the fantasy was also regarded as a kind of a useless device. Most realists thought that it would be far away from the essence of the real life. The fantasy was a taboo in the works of Balzac or Thomas Hardy.

Now we all know that fantasy and reality was not a contradiction. Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Marques, and Jose Saramagu located the point where these two enemies meet, waving white flags. The blind men's city that Saramagu made up does not exist in this world, nor does the Buendes Family Marques made up. To create the surrealistic situation beyond real life included the fantasy as well as the imagination. That is, they found out that fantasy could be a good allegory through which to reflect reality.

Borges played with the idea that concrete reality may consist only of mental perceptions. The 'real world' is only one possible in the infinite series of realities. These themes were examined among others in the classical short stories. In *'La Biblioteca de Babel'* the symmetrically structured library represents the universe

as it is conceived by rational man, and the library's illegible books refers to man's ignorance. In *'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'* Borges invented a whole other universe based on an imaginary encyclopedia. The narrator says: "Tlön is surely a labyrinth, but it is a labyrinth devised by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men."

If so, is fantasy only an aid for reality? Now everything has changed a lot. Our time is proceeding toward the postmodern society from the realistic circumstance of the modern society. In such a view, we are approaching the point that a great change is required in the literary style of the novel, because the novel is the typical literary form produced by the modern period. A new style excluding reality completely, such as the *Matrix* series, or the *Harry Potter* series, becomes a powerful device that makes our pure desire come true.

The postmodern paradigm emphasizes parts, not the whole. The sum of the parts does not make the whole, but the whole can be materialized within parts. The term 'Beat-Bang,' referring to the digital revolution, can be explained exactly as the relationship between parts and the whole. The beat is the unit that has no sound, smell, or weight, but that moves as fast as the speed of light. This small unit is leading the revolution of the world. This change is reversing the relationship between society and the individual. The modern rule of the realistic society must perish, and be replaced by fantasy.

Having crossed through the postmodern society, we are now arriving in the digital and cyber period. In cyberspace we can all be Chuang Tzu's butterflies. Let me give you an example. 'Simms On-line' is a so-called 'life simulation' game that can reproduce the real world in cyberspace. Everyone lives there as 'an avatar,' the other ego. In the cyber city, lovers look for the romantic beach to enjoy dates, and kiss and embrace, and they can even have sex with each other.

With getting fantasy and reality confused, our relationship with other people is changing. Here is one more example. 'RamdaMoo' is a kind of text-based online game. Mr. Bungle, an avatar, raped two other female avatars, and other online users prosecuted him. This was followed by an extensive debate in the cyber world. Some people said they had no right to punish him, while others said that he should be punished in the real world. The case came to end with the conclusion that he was banished from the network.

Although some people say that these online human relationships are vacant and valueless, more net users are willing to enter cyberspace and to be 'digital butterflies.' Now fantasy is mingled with digital reality, and dominates our bodies as well as our imaginations. We cannot distinguish fantasy from reality any longer in this *Matrix* world.

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