The Ground of Radical Fantasy:
Imagining a Critical Theory of Fantastic Literature

by

Morgan Young

B.G.S, Simon Fraser University, 2008

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the

Department of Humanities

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

© Morgan Elyse Young 2021

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2021

Declaration of Committee

Name:	**Morgan Young**
Degree:	**Master of Arts**
Thesis title:	**The Ground of Radical Fantasy: Imagining a Critical Theory of Fantastic Literature**

Committee: **Chair:** Dimitris Krallis
Professor, Humanities

Samir Gandesha
Supervisor
Associate Professor, Humanities

Jerry Zaslove
Committee Member
Professor Emeritus, Humanities and English

Jaleh Mansoor
Examiner
Associate Professor, Art History
University of British Columbia

Abstract

To what extent can fantasy offer a radical critique of society? What does it take to imagine genuine alternate possibilities in modernity, while we remain under the hegemony of technocratic rationalization? This is not simply a question of *what* we think; it is a question of *how* we think, and in that context, fantasy may offer surprising insights. Ideas for a critical theory of fantasy should be concerned with how we imagine and how we can re-imagine ourselves in the world, constituting an approach toward possibility and potentiality. This thesis argues that radical fantasy is a way of looking to the past, to the margins of society, and to the human imaginative capacity to conceive of that which is not possible under the horizon of late capitalism.

Keywords: radical fantasy and speculative fiction; fantastic and imaginative literature; Marxist criticism of fantasy; Frankfurt School Critical Theory; romanticism and utopian aesthetics; China Miéville

For fellow modern romantics finding refuge in the imagination.

Acknowledgements

A thesis, or any substantive piece of writing, is both a solitary and a communal endeavour. The writer works alone, but does so in the context of networks of support that are not always visible. The writing of a thesis during a global pandemic accentuates the associated isolation and the structures of support. It has been a profoundly challenging undertaking, its stresses made tolerable only through the kindness of others. A special thanks to family and friends for making up that invisible foundation.

I am grateful to the Department of Humanities, as well as Graduate Studies, for providing the flexibility, support, and accommodation needed for me to be able to accomplish this task. I hope that you find it a worthy contribution. I'd like to thank David Mirhady, and Ken Seigneurie in World Languages and Literatures, for the wonderful learning opportunities masquerading as teaching opportunities, whose influences make appearances throughout the thesis. I'd also like to acknowledge the efforts of the department staff, including Alice Hartley, Carolyn Richard, Cristina Serverius, and Huyen Pham at the Institute for the Humanities.

I am fortunate to have had an exceptional committee, and an encouraging and generous supervisor in Samir Gandesha. In addition to offering an abundance of theoretical knowledge, shared over many discussions with my ever-present notebooks at the ready, you have opened doors in ways that have a far-reaching impact on my own future possibilities. Thank you for widening my horizon.

To the incomparable Jerry Zaslove: I gladly follow your breadcrumbs through this forest. Thank you for seeing me, and for knowing where I was headed before I knew myself.

Table of Contents

Prologue:

Entering Fantastic Worlds

You are reading a fantasy novel. You are immersed in another world, one quite different from your own. There is detachment in this; it is, after all, not your world. The things that are happening are not real-world events, with real-world consequences and real-world importance. But then there is a moment. It is what you hope for but are never sure to get: you are reading, and you come across an idea that is so astonishing, so imaginative, that it simultaneously knocks you out of yourself and brings you firmly into the now. You are almost a child again, wondering. This isn't shock, or even surprise. It is discovery. At other times, you might feel a resonant familiarity, a palpable tension created by the longing for something missing and the joy at its emergent recognition.

There is a particular kind of involvement in fantasy narratives that is striking: these are worlds that people want, in many cases, not to experience momentarily but to inhabit. The reactionary response here is to cry "*escapism!*" —a denunciation generally accompanied by a host of derogatory insinuations. This charge can be justified. Even in those supposedly warranted cases of banal escapism, however, we are still being given significant indications. These fantastic desires speak to a need. Our world, the world of modernity, is in many ways not livable. As we move ever forward in the destruction of our planet, we transition in greater numbers and degrees from the tolerable to the intolerable. The options that are offered to us within the confines of capitalist modernity are lacking something that is inherently valuable, something we intuit but have difficulty articulating. We search for it, in other worlds. We search in other worlds because we are not sure of what can exist in our own.

I would claim that this is what constitutes radical fantasy. Its magic happens not in spells or powers, but in imaginative leaps. Someone has constructed another world, one that is not necessarily realistic, but one that is conceivable, and is conceivable in ways that we do not normally go about conceiving; a world that is livable, but in ways in which we do not normally go about living. Most importantly, one that possesses elements our

1

world lacks. Whether it is possible for our world to ever include those elements is not what is most relevant. We have been reading and have been made to wonder. And if we are curious, that wonder might extend back into our lives, our realities. What here, in this world, is lacking? What is imaginable? What is possible?

Chapter 1.

The Horizon (Finding Ground)

In the attempt to find footing in the ground of radical fantasy, I follow historical paths that show fantasy as inextricably entwined with the development of capitalism; more specifically, as rooted in romanticism as a response to capitalist modernity and the project of Enlightenment. Fantasy can be seen manifesting and revealing social and internal processes of rupture, reconnection, and reconfiguration, incorporating a contradictory but nonetheless significant resistance to processes of instrumentalization. These manifestations can be brought to light through an examination of utopian aesthetics in the Frankfurt School, particularly Herbert Marcuse's aesthetic dimension, Ernst Bloch's anticipatory illumination, and Walter Benjamin's ideas of recovery and awakening. Fantasy provides a refuge for underground worlds: not just worlds as they can be imagined, but the real possibilities for differences in social relations that have existed through cultural and political struggle, and continue to have a utopian function with active, future-bearing qualities. Radical fantasy provides an imaginative matrix for a dialectic of art and lived experience, nurturing perspectives that value, defend, and promote life and the flourishing of life, rather than the continued entrenchment of domination, alienation, and destruction.

This chapter includes preliminary ideas of genre, as well as current issues in Marxist approaches to fantasy, addressing the Suvinian paradigm of fantasy as escapist and consolatory. China Miéville provides the defense: that this paradigm mischaracterizes fantasy and negates the importance of the imagination. He articulates the need for alternative theoretical approaches to fantastic literature, and provides an outline for his own construct of fantasy as a literature of alterity that incorporates a dialectic of the real and the not-real. The question is: what makes critics want to diminish fantasy as a genre? What does fantasy conjure up in terms of desires and tendencies? What dangers does it pose?

1.1. Defining Genre: Current Scholarship on Fantasy

In discussing fantasy, one immediately comes up against the problem of genre. Due to the open-ended and expanding nature of fantasy as a literary genre, a wide variety of theoretical approaches can be utilized, and definitions regarding what is and is not considered fantasy change substantially with the chosen approach. The broader umbrella of the *fantastic* can be usefully employed, but generates disagreement as under the most wide-ranging guidelines, any work of fiction that incorporates elements of the supernatural or imaginary could be included. In contrast, the adoption of extremely restrictive categorizations poses the risk of basing analyses on a highly subjective choice of works that is not necessarily reflective of the entirety of the genre, which can only be compounded as fantasy further develops and extends its boundaries. Categorizations of fantasy are numerous, inconsistent, and overlap with other genres such as horror and science fiction. It is for this reason that the more general category of *speculative fiction* is now widely employed. While this is also a useful umbrella term, we do still tend to make distinctions between genres, predominantly between science fiction and fantasy—often with prejudice. This opposition may be rooted in much more than issues of taste or style, involving values and even our conceptions of rationality.

It can be quite difficult to get a clear sense of fantasy at all, but I suggest that this lack of clarity or agreement regarding what fantasy *is* stems from a more fundamental lack of clarity about what fantasy *does*. Here, I refer not to literary or structural ideas regarding the function of a particular narrative, but to the way in which fantasy represents a response to and means of understanding the crisis of modernity, which I propose is rooted in romanticism. There is general agreement amongst major theorists in fantasy that fantasy is concerned with the impossible, while the improbable but possible is regarded as the province of science fiction (James and Mendlesohn, *Cambridge Companion* 1). Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James refer to this as the "supernatural" definition of fantasy, noting a concern that it is limited by being "culturally specific" (*Short History* 3), since a sharp demarcation between natural and supernatural, real and unreal is not universal. Regarding the historical roots of the genre, Mendlesohn and James argue that placing fantasy's origin solely in the 18th century as a response to Enlightenment

rationalism does not consider the more ancient history of the fantastic as a narrative mode. They state that fantasy has likely always been present in literature—in fact, predating literature, in storytelling—as a "normal mode," but that the genre could be identified as coextensive with realism or mimesis as genre (*Short History* 7). In this, they are in line with Brian Attebery. In *Strategies of Fantasy*, Attebery effectively addresses this problem by discretely separating definitions of fantasy as mode and as genre, as well as adding the idea of formula: he thus uses *fantastic* to apply to the mode and *fantasy* to apply to the genre, while formula refers to the structure of the narrative and its tropes.

Since there is a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives contributing to confusion regarding fantasy's definition and interpretation as genre, both Attebery and Mendlesohn have adopted the idea of "fuzzy sets," which Attebery describes as "meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but by a center" designating "a perceived grouping" (*Strategies* 12). The fuzzy set is seen by Mendlesohn as the now prevalent means of organizing genre (*Rhetoric* xiii), and is useful because it means that we can deal with these varying and sometimes conflicting groupings and shifting boundaries without necessarily having to create fixed categorizations or a taxonomy; this approach ends up being more reflective of how writers and readers perceive the genre.[1] Delineations between critics, authors, and readers make up their own fuzzy set: a good deal of criticism on fantasy has been written by fantasy authors and importantly, by fans (Attebery *Stories* 33), and authors in this genre seem to be particularly responsive both to criticism as well as to their audience (Mendlesohn and James, *Short History* 4-5). Writers and theorists are often avid readers and fans. The genre is therefore strongly defined in relation to, and in communication with, its audience (Attebery *Stories* 34). For genre writers who embrace the field, there seems to be an investment in actively developing it.

Fantasy's writers have regularly been put on the defensive, having to argue not only for the value of particular works but for the value of the genre as a whole. They must act as fantasy's champions. I propose that this is the case for specific reasons that relate to

---

[1] I am pointing to the fuzzy set as a flexible approach to genre that can accommodate connections between genres and sub-genres, but maintain that if used, it should be employed in combination with a critical approach, not as a means of circumventing critical analysis.

fantasy's history as well as its content. Fantasy is a genre in flux, with porous boundaries that not only defy consistent categorization, but change with the considerable inventiveness of its writers, continually reimagined as they formulate and reformulate it in the same manner as their fictional worlds. Theories of fantasy must therefore engage not only with those fictional worlds, but with authors' conceptions of what it means to create them in the first place. The dialogue between theory and critics, and art and writers, as well as with readers can form the basis of a "productive critique" of fantasy that not only acknowledges these interrelationships but views them as essential to a critical understanding, and can assist with the reading of works, the literary experience.[2]

If fantasy has itself been marginalized in relation to more orthodox literary approaches, it has thus become a kind of refuge, though this may change as it continues to take hold as highly popular commercial fiction.[3] Fantasy's popularity has skyrocketed in the past few decades, and within speculative fiction there has been a shift from a prevalence of science fiction and horror to a prevalence of fantasy (Mendlesohn and James, *Short History* 5). The fact that fantasy has become so popular should make it of immediate interest for criticism. The fact that it represents the most marketable category of speculative fiction should make it of interest to critical theory. Fantasy has become profitable, and so we should be attentive to the degree to which it shifts from being marginalized to being appropriated and confined within acceptable social boundaries—though its "fuzziness" may help it to resist categorization and co-optation.

1.2. Understanding Fantasy Critically: Critical Theory and Fantasy's Romanticism

Turning to ideas for a critical theory of fantasy, which involves consideration not simply of how we can construct a critique of fantasy, but of how fantasy itself can

---

[2] I owe this idea of a "productive critique" to Jerry Zaslove ("Personal").

[3] The marginalization here reflects ongoing disputes that differentiate literary fiction as genre from supposedly lesser genre forms. Both fantasy and science fiction developed, in the 20th century, in mass market contexts, published in magazines and as paperbacks often considered pulp. This has led to their denigration as genre fiction in opposition to literary fiction. So fantasy's commercialization does not constitute a change; rather, its popularity is challenging the perceived superiority of literary fiction as a distinct category.

provide a radical critique of society. A future critical theory of fantasy would necessarily be part of a larger field of theory of radical speculative fiction in which science fiction, fantasy, and genre-crossing narratives can be analyzed. A critical understanding is, however, not meant to be simply another reading of the literature, but to be in and of itself dialectical: it is meant to address how we read and interpret fantasy, and to show how fantasy can reflect our limitations under capitalism as well as provide us with cognitive worlds in which to imagine alternative ways of living, thinking, being. This critical understanding involves curiosity about the role of the imagination in terms of the selection of viable social alternatives, but also an expansion of ideas we perceive as viable. It thus provides a kind of double criticism: it can serve not only to show the losses engendered by capitalist constructions, but also to highlight the ways in which imagining anticapitalist forms replicates certain conceptual pitfalls embedded in Enlightenment rationalism. Movement toward a critical theory of fantasy should incorporate considerations of the political, not just in terms of how political analyses can be applied to fantasy literature, but in terms of how fantasy can inform and influence greater cultural narratives, and as such represents a political form—a remarkably popular and dynamic one, for all that it has been dismissed.

This thesis attempts to address a conflict and an absence in the literature, pointing not only to possible reasons but to areas in which further development in criticism would be fruitful. In scholarship on critical theory and fantasy, particularly in Marxist theory concerning speculative fiction, I encountered a predominance of science fiction criticism, and not only a dearth of material discussing fantasy, but an active antipathy toward the genre. Here, all roads seem to lead back to Darko Suvin and the anti-fantastic paradigm of criticism that has developed following him.[4] This reflects a larger dispute within Marxist thought, where disapproval of fantasy is another rendering of romanticism as a bad word. Other fantasy theorists do emphasize the development of fantasy as genre in the Romantic period, noting an important shift in thought and in literature that occurs with the Enlightenment, modernity, and industrialization, but seem to talk around the relevance of capitalism and class relations. I suggest that one way out of the conflict, and

---

[4] The Suvinian paradigm will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

into the absence, is through the romantic and utopian threads present in Frankfurt School Critical Theory—as reflected most strongly in the work of Bloch and Marcuse, but also Benjamin—which can be used to develop, or at least try to envision, a critical theory of radical fantasy, and to contrast the more prevalent materialist frameworks that privilege science fiction over fantasy. In exploring the origins of fantasy literature as a reaction not simply to Enlightenment rationalism but to the development of capitalism, it is important to consider romanticism as a response to modernity, comprising a mode of thought or worldview that has been highly influential yet equally disregarded, and I argue that fantasy cannot be adequately understood without this world-historical context and am elaborating on it.

Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre contest the derision of romanticism, insisting that it can be revolutionary and may represent a necessary counterbalance. Though it has a longer "prehistory" (Löwy and Sayre 46) as does the fantastic as mode, romanticism proper comes into being in the 18th century as a "cultural response" to capitalism (47). Two historical "points of rupture" that characterize romanticism include: the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the destruction of "medieval social bonds," with the Renaissance as a primary period of primitive accumulation; and the Industrial Revolution, which comprised the systematic crystallization and entrenchment of capitalism (Löwy and Sayre 48). Löwy and Sayre locate the geographical "'kernel' or heart of the phenomenon" in France, England, and Germany in the last half of the 18th century, specifically because of their head start in modernization and the adoption of capitalism (49). Romanticism is concerned with both a capitalist economy and bourgeois culture, and therefore it appeared later in other countries (50-51).

Romanticism emerges as a critique of modernity. Löwy and Sayre refer to Max Weber to identify certain defining features of modernity: a "calculating spirit"; "disenchantment"; "instrumental rationality"; and "bureaucratic domination" (19). Romanticism responds to "ideological facets of the spirit of Enlightenment … bound up with the new reification of life, which reduced human aspirations to egoistic calculations" (49). Löwy and Sayre describe these features of capitalist modernity as a "*Gesamtkomplex*" related to processes of "rationalization, bureaucratization …

urbanization, secularization, reification, etc." (19); through the Frankfurt School, we can understand these processes to result in total administration. Romanticism is a reply to the reach of these features into all aspects of life. The opposition of romanticism to the Enlightenment should acknowledge that "there is more than one Enlightenment" and "there is more than one Romanticism" (Löwy and Sayre 55), and it is possible to observe "all sorts of blends, articulations, juxtapositions, hesitations, and passages between the two perspectives" (56).

What differentiates revolutionary or utopian romanticism is the attempt to "invest the nostalgia for the precapitalist past in the hope for a radically new future" (Löwy and Sayre 73). The characterization of romanticism in certain Marxist critiques as a "bourgeois ideology" is a result of "a certain dogmatic deformation that violently represses the affinities between Marxism and Romanticism" at the expense of romanticism's radical critique (84). A romantic Marxism needs to reconcile the premodern as a model for communitarian relations with the now inescapable changes produced by modernity: individualism, science and technology, complexity, and urbanity (116).

In keeping with the broad genre distinction, we can see two basic historical and stylistic orientations within romanticism: the gothic and the mythic, as well as their extension and expression in modernism. I have derived these orientations from the history of fantasy literature, more specifically from the roots of the genre in the Enlightenment and Romantic periods. Some version or other of these general groupings or a division along these lines is widely acknowledged and present in fantasy scholarship, though again, they are "fuzzy."

1.3. Gothic Literature and the Gothic Character of Fantasy

The literature that can be ascribed to the gothic style emerges from the Gothic romances and ghost stories of the 18th century. These were intrinsically connected to Enlightenment values and politics, reflecting both an acceptance and internalization of those values as well as an uneasiness with them. Mendlesohn and James describe it as the

"sense that something existed below the world as it was delineated by those in power," which was "subverted" in Gothic literature into the idea that "this surface world is an illusion" (*Short History* 14). Characteristic of Gothic literature is tension between the real or rational and the supernatural. The Gothic was also medievalist—hence the origin of the term with the Goths—and was intended in many ways to be a critique or "commentary on the barbarity of the modern age" (*Short History* 15). What distinguishes the Gothic from older ghost stories is the presence of the uncanny and the sublime.[5] These characteristics of the Gothic have been directly transferred to both science fiction and fantasy, as Adam Roberts explains:

> … science fiction's 'sense of wonder' is in effect a straight translation of the Burkean sublime into a cosmic, scientific and materialist idiom; fantasy's 'magic' is understood as more than merely a narrative device: readers picking up fantasy titles in search of a 'magical' or 'Faerie' mood are acting upon a desire to be aesthetically sublimated into a state of mind that does not admit of rational reduction. (26)

The gothic orientation is thus stylistically and thematically associated with the weird, the grotesque, the carnivalesque, and the uncanny. The gothic orientation lends itself more straightforwardly to Marxist interpretations—what amounts to the gothic critique of capitalism—though I argue that the gothic does not innately possess a more revolutionary character than the mythic, and that conventional and radical narratives can be present in both orientations. To a certain extent, as Miéville argues, this "is contingent on *content*"; it is ultimately the substance of the narrative, not its style, that is relevant ("Editorial" 42). However, there does seem to be an emphasis on gothic characterizations as representing those narratives most worthy of consideration for Marxist criticism: the monsters of the gothic present themselves easily to view and make obvious metaphors for the monsters of capitalism. They constitute a negative critique of society and a rejection of idealism.

---

[5] Roberts specifically refers to the Burkean sublime, as seen in the quote, which has important implications in terms of a tendency toward conservative and reactionary interpretations.

1.4. Myth, Folk Tale, and Fairy Tale: The Mythic Character of Fantasy

Moving on from the gothic, we can consider the genres of fantastic literature that grew out of myth and fairy tale or folk tale. The mythic orientation is intended to include those works that are specifically mythic, relating to existing cultural myths, those more generally related to folklore, as well as those that are mythopoetic or mythopoeic. Attebery defines myth as "any collective story that encapsulates a world view and authorizes belief," but in relation to fantasy he uses myth as another umbrella term to include associated fantastic forms such as tales, legends, and epics (*Stories* 2). I will be using the mythic as a similar umbrella term. What is relevant to fantasy as genre is the way in which authors use myth and mythopoesis in imaginative storytelling. Mythopoesis refers to the process of myth-making, and in fantasy mythopoetic works involve the creation of imaginary mythologies or the retelling and reuse of existing ones in the formulation of an invented secondary world[6]; but even those that are new tend to utilize similar logics and formulas to those works more directly derived from folk and mythic traditions. Certain fantastic texts that predate fantasy as a distinct genre provide what John Clute calls "taproots" for modern fantasy narratives; these have particular significance for fantasy's development.[7]

The characterization of fantasy as genre, beginning at the tail end of the 18th century, corresponds to a shift where authors became conscious of transforming and mediating the mythic and fantastic (Attebery *Stories* 26). Many works that could be categorized as mythic should be understood as archetypal. They employ a good deal of the tropes that are most often recognized as belonging to the genre—especially those of

---

[6] For instance, J.R.R. Tolkien's secondary worlds have been influenced by his academic work in philology and his detailed study of texts such as *Beowulf*. His translation of *Beowulf* has been published posthumously.

[7] Clute mentions texts such as Homer's *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Shakespeare plays such as *The Tempest* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Perrault's *Tales of Mother Goose*, and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, among others, as examples of taproot texts.

heroic or high fantasy[8]—and tend to be formulaic. Attebery explains that formula is standard in the structure of myth and tales but is generally disdained in the novel. Fantasy utilizes but also adapts mythic formula to various degrees of success; he asserts that the actual object of disdain here is the bulk of mediocre mass market fantasy (Attebery *Stories* 97) which encompasses "no risk and no transformation" (108).

Mirroring the medievalism of the Gothic, medieval romances have influenced the mythic orientation of fantasy. Mendlesohn and James discuss the Arthurian cycle in particular, stating that it has persisted as a "folklore of the elite" functioning to bolster Christian authority and use chivalry to provide "a moral authority" for the ruling classes (*Short History* 10). This style of medievalism exemplifies the conservative and counterrevolutionary tendencies that tend to be more prevalent in mythic narratives. These are not always isolated for criticism but can instead be cited as justification for generalizations regarding all mythic works and even fantasy in its entirety.

The emergence of fantasy as genre is also tied to the rediscovery and study of the mythic by collectors and scholars. This informs the idea of a shift or discontinuity in the Early Modern, with the Romantics then responding to the mythic that belongs to the past as lost (Attebery *Stories* 26). Collectors such as Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm "domesticated [folk] tales for their (respectively) aristocratic and bourgeois readers" as fairy tales (Mendlesohn and James, *Short History* 11).[9] The initial audience for fairy tale was adult, but during the 19th century revival of fairy tale it became directed at children (Mendlesohn and James, *Short History* 13-14). Gary Wolfe explains that it became the common viewpoint, particularly later on in the century, that "fantastic inventions, in an increasingly pragmatic and industrialized age, required some sort of extra-literary rationale" (10). For the Victorians, myths and tales were untruths meant for children, women, and the lower classes (Attebery *Stories* 13).

---

[8] High fantasy refers to the creation of a secondary world. Heroic fantasy, otherwise known as Sword and Sorcery, focuses on a hero. These terms are often used interchangeably, along with epic fantasy. See Clute for distinctions.

[9] E.T.A. Hoffmann has been influential in his creation of "original" fairy tales (Mendlesohn and James, *Short History* 11-12), perhaps the most famous of which are the stories of *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* and *The Sandman*; Hoffmann has also been an influential figure of German Romanticism.

At least some of the belittling of fantasy that now occurs in many critiques and that permeates common attitudes can be traced back to this shift in perspective toward an infantilization of storytelling traditions. This was, of course, consistent with the positivism that dominated social thought at the time, though fantasy must still defend itself against critiques that have changed little since the 19th century. The further development of fantasy in the early 20th century in mass market forms (Attebery *Stories* 33), with the result of a bias against popular or genre literature, is then reflected in the particular critiques of fantasy that try to privilege science fiction on the basis of it being more realistic.

These critiques can be challenged. Marxist critiques focus on tendencies toward the idealization and restoration of the ancien régime in the conservatism of fantastic narratives. The one prominent author inevitably used as an exemplar of escapist fantasy, by both proponents and detractors, is J.R.R. Tolkien, who is considered a paradigmatic figure. Tolkien and Tolkienesque works are the typical targets of such critiques.[10] In contrast, as one type of challenge, postcolonial or decolonial fantasy consistent with a decolonial critique of the kind offered by scholars such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Daniel Heath Justice could refer to values of cultural and environmental conservation, as well as restitution in relation to oppression and physical and cultural genocide. It is necessary to address concerns of Eurocentrism and therefore to indicate the importance of a decolonial critique when discussing myth and folk tale. It is also necessary in discussions of the premodern—there is an assumed homogeneity here, or an assumed location in the European premodern—as well as in relation to living cultural and religious traditions.[11] Attention must be paid to the degree to which these traditions have been appropriated, mischaracterized, and decontextualized. The presence of diverse texts

---

[10] Tolkien's most influential and recognizable works are *The Hobbit* and The Lord of the Rings trilogy. Since Tolkien is paradigmatic, there are many possible examples of Tolkienesque works in the high fantasy tradition; Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea series could be cited as a radical example.

[11] I acknowledge here that I do not have the scope to properly address these concerns or present an adequate decolonial critique; it is therefore my intention to indicate the need for such critiques and to present this as a crucial element for further development and analysis, especially in relation to ideas of the premodern. In addition to the decolonial critiques of Simpson and Justice, I would point to Justice as a fantasy author, and to authors like Cherie Dimaline and N.K. Jemisin as providing great examples within fantasy literature, though there are many others. Simpson is also an author of fiction, largely categorized as literary fiction, but the integration of theory and story is important in her work.

through representation is necessary but not sufficient. Alternative conceptualizations present in both premodern mythic traditions—those that have lost their contexts—and living mythic traditions (Attebery *Stories* 20) that have been devalued under current systems of rationalization and technocratic hegemony, as well as their related mythopoetic variations in fantasy, can be carefully and conscientiously recognized as depicting a radical mythic.

1.5. Fantasy as the Modern Romantic and Romantic Orientations in Miéville

Radical fantasy is an arena in which alternatives to capitalism can be explored conceptually, developed into possible worlds that we can contemplate. The aesthetic movements of romanticism and modernism indicate worldviews or conceptual worlds that shape fantasy. The fantastic as a mode is ancient and enmeshed with myth and folktale, but fantasy as genre is *modern* both historically and in its expression in the form of the novel. It is not anti-modern but is an expression of modernism, and as such fantasy as genre can be described as the modern romantic.

Attebery specifically links fantasy to romanticism and modernism, with the crystallization of fantasy as genre as co-occurrent with modernism. He proposes seeing the fantasy of the early 20th century as a "manifestation" of modernism (Attebery *Stories* 42), noting that there is more than one way to be modern (19). Fantasy is therefore a way of understanding the experience of modernity. Ideas of subjectivity and the inner experience, as defining aspects of Romantic thought, are of particular importance to the modern romantic and fantasy's expression of it. The "contemporary fantastic" involves border crossings and reconfigurations of both content and the genre itself (Attebery *Stories* 172), and its radical iterations recognize the cost and suffering created through myths of progress and enlightenment which have resulted in catastrophe.

Theoretical analysis is followed by examples from one author, China Miéville. While it is more typical to include a comparison of the works of several authors, I have found it useful to focus on discovering tracks of the concepts I am outlining within a single author's work: on finding the ground of fantasy in the literary object of analysis. I

have therefore included a selection of Miéville's novels that can be analysed as representative of the variations of romanticism presented in this thesis. One of the strengths of the approach I am attempting to work out is that it can be applied to a single author's work and remain consistent, rather than being reliant on the cherry-picking of examples to suit, avoiding the grouping problems mentioned earlier and showing instead how these orientations, as well as processes of rupture, reconnection, and reconfiguration, are manifested. I have chosen Miéville as a well-regarded writer of speculative fiction located firmly in radical currents, specifically Marxist ones, and because he has written extensive criticism, which re-emphasizes the role of the author in defining genre as part of a productive critique.

1.6. The Dominance of the Suvinian Paradigm in Marxist Theory of Fantasy

There is a persistent question, or perhaps an interrogation, whenever we consider speculative fiction from a Marxist perspective: to what extent do these stories offer up genuine alternatives? To what extent do they have the capacity to do so, and to what extent is that their function? It has been seen as the prerogative of science fiction to give us a roadmap to the future, while fantasy has been thought to inhabit regressive backwaters. This has certainly been the mainstay of the Marxist approach to fantasy, long dominated by Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement. Marxist critics have historically accepted science fiction as a valid field of study while rejecting fantasy, following in the footsteps of Suvin. His concept of cognitive estrangement was put forward in his 1979 text, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, and has been advanced notably by Carl Freedman. Fredric Jameson's criticism of science fiction and fantasy encompasses what James Gifford calls a Jamesonian paradigm (*Modernist* 16), which I will not consider in detail but indicate as comparably influential to the Suvinian paradigm and as consistent with or sympathetic to Suvin, with both approaches contributing to a so-called schism in Marxist criticism of speculative fiction (Jameson *Archaeologies* 57).[14]

---

[14] Gifford shows Jameson's influence on Marxist theorists of fantasy such as Rosemary Jackson and José Monleón, and offers a useful critique of the Jamesonian paradigm (*Modernist* 24-30, 38-44).

The basic idea of cognitive estrangement is that science fiction has a rational cognitive aspect, disparate from mythic and supernatural approaches, that distances it from other kinds of estranging narratives, with an infamous dismissal of fantasy as a "subliterature of mystification" that is "anti-cognitive" (Suvin *Metamorphoses* 20). This attitude has spread so widely that it is near impossible to address the literature without dealing with the Suvinian paradigm and its many reiterations. Critiques of this paradigm have tended to focus on the cognitive part of the formulation, but I also wonder about the estrangement part. We live in strange times. Reality seems to be blurring with fiction in the most unfortunate ways. We appear to be following dystopian narratives as if they were scripts: their original strangeness has grown into a familiarity that can even seem comforting in its manifestation of dire futures, which present as inevitabilities.[15] We are plagued by that now proverbial notion: that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism."[16]

In the schism in theory, science fiction is allied to the progressive and the utopian, in opposition to the reactionary proto-fascism that has been the assumed dogma of fantasy (Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. 288). Suvinian arguments are largely based on the denunciation of fantasy as escape or consolation, with an assumed reactionary alignment. Fantasy is portrayed not only as regressive but as a constriction of the radical energies and potential deemed possible only in science fiction. And there is certainly a wealth of material in the genre to support such perspectives. But any claims to their universality fall far short of being substantiated and do a great injustice to the genre by supporting widely-held prejudices.

---

[15] I could point to increasing technological surveillance, and how easily we adapt to its presence, or how every month of the Trump presidency seemed to push the limits of the tolerable even further, followed by a reaffirming chorus of "I told you so" in response. But it is the now yearly wildfires on the west coast of North America—my home—followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as catastrophic experiences that have taken on the character of the mundane, that are confirming my own worst fears. We really are plagued by capitalism.

[16] "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" is often attributed to Jameson, but probably originates with H. Bruce Franklin, "What Are We to Make of JG Ballard's Apocalypse?"

The creation of this dichotomy has resulted in gatekeeping. There is begrudging acceptance of *some* fantasy, where theorists cherry-pick acceptable works to fit their existing theories. Suvin elaborated on—and to a minor extent, recanted—his position in a more recent essay on fantasy, acknowledging that "a precious fraction" of fantasy texts may incorporate critical content ("Considering" 211). This reluctant acceptance of some works as valid or deserving of consideration has, to a great extent, been compelled by fantasy's authors. The likes of Ursula K. Le Guin and Samuel Delany were simply so good, so obviously of remarkable literary caliber and producing radical content, that their dismissals could not be justified. And as the list of writers designated as acceptable has grown over the years, forcing itself upon critics and belying their concerns, arguments regarding the irrelevance of fantasy have lost much of their bite. How many exceptions must one make to a rule before the rule itself comes into question?

Regardless, cognitive estrangement remains a prominent paradigm in Marxist theories of science fiction and fantasy. Suvin associates fantasy with "desire" rather than "possibility," and characterizes fantasy as an understandable response to the alienation engendered by "technoscientific rationality" ("Considering" 213), objecting to fantasy on the grounds that it is reactionary and compensatory. This isn't an unnecessary argument: it is important to look at fantasy in relation to capitalism and as a response to alienation, and we must pay attention to the tendency toward its co-option. This is one of Suvin's main concerns, one that is justifiable: that "capitalism is notoriously the social formation most efficient at co-opting potentialities into Darth Vaders" ("Considering" 233), warning that fantasy provides gratifications that may be used to deflate critique (236). His argument that it serves to "contain" the radical potential of science fiction by siphoning off focus and energies (Suvin "Considering" 240) accords with the Marcusean notion that potential energies for change can be liquidated, providing catharsis and satisfaction (Marcuse *One-Dimensional* 70-1, 75; *Aesthetic* 59).

Suvin also implies that the impulse toward fantasy is connected to despair, though this is presented in contrast to an overstated science fictional optimism. He alleges that people who are attracted to science fiction have "confidence" in their ability for directed action in the face of problems, whereas fantasy draws in those who are marginalized and

have "lost that confidence" (Suvin "Considering" 238). Suvin's argument here smacks of condescension. He is broadly portraying fantasy readers as something like a mass of insecure goth kids who just don't know how to stop being sad. Suvin insists on essentializing both science fiction and fantasy in the hopes of legitimizing one by delegitimizing the other.

1.7. Extension of the Suvinian Paradigm: Converting Fantasy to Science Fiction

Other theorists, such as Freedman and Jameson, approach the issue by taking a narrow view of the fantasy genre in its mythic iterations for the purposes of critique. Anything that does not fit within that framework is made an exception or is redefined within another genre, particularly science fiction, to give greater credibility or acceptability. This line of reasoning amounts to gatekeeping and does not acknowledge speculative and fantastic fiction as a continuum, with crossover genres like science fantasy and urban fantasy, and with many writers, including Miéville and Le Guin, writing in multiple subgenres. The reclassification of fantasy as science fictional can be countered with Miéville's stronger contention that fantasy, not just science fiction, can be conceptually radical.

Carl Freedman attempts to convert fantasy to science fiction by making some fantasy cognitive in the sense articulated in theories of cognitive estrangement. Freedman relies on Adorno to present a "dialectic of fantasy and realism," which supports his formulation of an acceptable speculative approach encompassing a "properly cognitive, science-fictional narrative logic" (8). Freedman's incorporation of an Adornian dialectic serves to obscure the biases in his assertion of the "properly cognitive." Freedman's defense of Miéville's fantasy—in contrast to other, ostensibly unsatisfying examples of the genre—rests on the idea of the supernatural being interpreted metaphorically, representing the real (80). He contends that estranging narratives work by articulating the

18

real through formations of the not-real, and these poles stand in a "determinate relation" to one another (Freedman 139).[17]

Suvinian interpretations require that estrangement be cognitive, and Freedman recognizes that it is the designation of cognitive in this context that has been vulnerable to criticism, noting that there are many science fictional texts with questionable or simply false scientific claims and projections, and that authors cannot be expected to be scientists (143-5). He calls his solution "the *cognition effect*," where science fiction need not be analyzed through external metrics, but instead through analysis of the cognitive validity of "*the text itself*" and the creation of this cognitive effect for the reader (145). He claims that fantasy lacks the cognition effect because it aims to create a "lifeworld" separate from the reality we experience (146). The contention is that by creating another world rather than attempting to engage with the problems in our existing one, fantasy is avoidant and lacks rationality.

Miéville has been a vocal opponent of the Suvinian paradigm, offering fierce rebukes. In "Cognition as Ideology," his Afterword to the 2009 essay collection *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, Miéville can be said—if such a thing is possible—to respectfully eviscerate the Suvinian approach.[18] Miéville condemns the biases present in formulations of cognitive estrangement, proposing that they entail "perhaps the major obstruction to theoretical progress in the field" ("Afterword" 232). However, he acknowledges that due to their influence and persistence, the problem of addressing these formulations remains a hoop to jump through, though he does contemplate a flat rejection of the Suvinian paradigm. Miéville establishes that the dispute between science fiction and fantasy predates Suvin's position, referring to similar arguments between Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. He maintains that not only fantasy, but much of science fiction is based on scientific "fallacies" (Miéville "Afterword" 233), as noted by Freedman. But the notion of a cognitive effect is also challenged: using Wells,

---

[17] Though it initially presents as similar, Freedman's formulation conflicts with Miéville's dialectic of the real and not-real, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

[18] It is important to note that this is in an afterword to a collection originally meant to include essays on both science fiction and fantasy, but from which fantasy was ultimately excluded, likely reflecting the same widespread biases.

Miéville explains that it is not the fantasist's role to be empirically convincing. Instead, the writer of fantasy, as well as the reader, perceives and participates in a kind of *game*, which is not meant to make "reality-claims" but rather "plausibility-claims" (Miéville "Afterword" 236). Fantasy then is a kind of "trickery," a "persuasion," which is enjoyable or "ludic" for all parties (238).

When stated this way, it seems like an obvious conclusion not only to most readers of fantasy, but those of science fiction as well, keeping in mind that these are not exclusive audiences. Readers seem to be able to appreciate both science fiction and fantasy, as well as their crossover genres, without any apparent difficulty. This speaks to the notion that Suvinian critics are either not engaging appropriately with readers or are condescending to a presumed reader base. Part of fantasy's trick is that it is mutually agreed upon; in this way, it is participatory for the reader, in the same way that one participates in, or agrees to, the trick of the magician or illusionist.[19] The trick that is not agreed upon is a manipulation, a con, taking advantage of the victim's lack of awareness.[20] Fantasy, like magical illusion, relies on a *willing* suspension of disbelief. There are always those who will actively look for the sleight of hand, who delight in its discovery, as opposed to the wonder of the illusion. Such people become writers.[21]

Miéville claims that cognitive estrangement's proponents, through their emphasis on a particular idea of cognition, are steadfastly ideological: the rationality proposed as part of this cognition does not reflect an idealized objective scientific mode, but rather "capitalist science's bullshit about itself" ("Afterword" 240).[22] He maintains that we should be working toward a "richer, socially embedded rationality, which would not be a degraded embarrassment" (240-1). Miéville argues that the conceptions of technological rationality being used in an adversarial manner in these arguments are at this point

---

[19] This is also true in film and other media, incorporating the image as illusory.

[20] The degree of awareness is a point that can be argued in relation to the large-scale manipulations of the culture industry; this will be further discussed in relation to Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* and Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

[21] Or editors. Perhaps both.

[22] This is not a critique of science per se, but a claim that Suvinian critiques are incorporating constructs of rationality consistent with those dominant under capitalism, and therefore lack necessary self-analysis.

outdated. He describes the continued insistence of this critique as "*specious*" (Miéville "Afterword" 241). Any assertion that fantasy, in form and content, is merely ideological, must be accompanied by the corresponding admission that science fiction is comparably ideological (243).

Freedman acknowledges Miéville's criticism that his idea of the cognition effect is functionally indistinguishable from Suvin's formulation of cognitive estrangement (146-7).[23] He recognizes Miéville's assessment that the cognition effect constitutes a "function of authority" since it obtains its "*supposed* cognitive logic from external authority" (Freedman 147). Freedman's response is that literary criticism is delimited by the literary and therefore also by the ideological (148). His justification is tautological. Rather than engaging with the substance of Miéville's critique, he accepts the premise without addressing its consequences. By edging around the latter, he puts himself in the contradictory position of defending a literary or rhetorical authority (Freedman 147) without following through to the real-world authority implied by his own ideological assumptions—a significant error in a theoretical construct based on the insistence that the genuinely cognitive must have an essential foundation in the real.

In trying to find a way to appropriate Miéville's work for his own cognitive effect theory, Freedman's argument seems to be that Miéville does not need to empirically base his worlds on the real world if they are more or less equivalent and avoid any extension into the supernatural.[24] So in the debates around genre, what is the substance of objections to fantasy that demand justifications for the world literary tradition of the fantastic? Though a more direct criticism would be a lack of class analysis in fantasy, Freedman cites a lack of historical context: that fantasy necessarily retreats from history and reality by not using the extrapolation of science fiction; he then also needs to make a

---

[23] Freedman here does reference Miéville's "Cognition as Ideology." He also quotes Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., who characterizes the argument as "'an *illusion* of valid knowledge created by imitating extratextual rational-scientific arguments and descriptions'" (Freedman 147).

[24] This demand relies on the idea of the supernatural as extra-natural, which is a product of Enlightenment values, in contrast to the idea of the supernatural as a manifestation or extension of the natural, which is insisted upon from certain historical and cultural perspectives. The distinct categorization of supernatural can therefore be perceived as a denigration of specific relational qualities embedded in some cultural and mythic traditions, as well as aesthetic ones, as will be seen in the discussion of the grotesque.

distinction from alternate history subgenres (151), further complicating his position, which seems to require an increasing degree of exceptions. It seems to be a metaphysical objection—a lack of materiality—though some fantasies have well-developed secondary worlds and articulated theories of magic, for example, that could be said to be "properly cognitive" or logical and consistent within their respective contexts.

This all ultimately seems like another veiled demand for realism. Freedman is committed to salvaging cognitive effect as a means of justifying science fiction, and limited fantasy by extension, through the lens or logic of realism, rather than embracing the notion that there might be something unique and valuable in irrealism. The approach here is reductive, not only restricting the possibilities available in fantasy—one of the core strengths of the genre—but also diminishing even those works that adhere to the proposed limitations. If a particular work lacks class consciousness, then it can be critiqued on that basis, without necessitating an impoverishment of the genre as a whole.

If we accept that capitalism has yet to eliminate all non-capitalist modes of thought and examples of cultures that have created imaginary and alternative forms of being, accepting that their historical and ongoing iterations have value, then are these not still necessary and valuable subjects of fantasy? Is this not historical? Is it necessarily non-cognitive? The great lengths to which theorists go to denigrate fantasy while recuperating science fiction serve only to obscure more vital issues concerning both genres. While there are fundamental differences that need to be analyzed, these should not be articulated in terms of cognition. Miéville insists that it is more useful to speak of configurations of estrangement, and he calls for new theories of fantasy that are not mired in Suvinian conceptions of cognition and rationality, proposing that science fiction and fantasy be considered literatures of "alterity" as a theoretical construct ("Afterword" 244).

1.8. Fantasy's Co-option as Repressive Desublimation

If Miéville effectively argues against the cognitive part of cognitive estrangement—and I would like to say that he does—then what about the estrangement

part? I would suggest, using Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, that the estranging qualities of fantasy, are, as Suvin fears, being liquidated through the process of repressive desublimation.[25] The strange is made familiar, made palatable, and is thus robbed of its strangeness, at least in the sense that these qualities not only demonstrate our alienation but also point to alternative ways of thinking. A psychological and cultural sublimation occurs, and estrangement *from* capitalist reality morphs into the estrangement *of* capitalist reality, with the preservation of renunciations imposed repressively, as the estranging narrative is first co-opted and reduced to the commodity form, and then exposed as co-opted, to no effect: the dimensionality offered by the otherness of art is "flattened" (Marcuse *One-Dimensional* 57).

Marcuse thus always looks to the margins and the powerless for resistance, to the "outcasts" (*One-Dimensional* 59). This should accord with fantasy, which has long been perceived as *marginal* in a variety of ways, but here co-option also occurs. The formerly estranging representations lose their "antagonistic force" (Marcuse *One-Dimensional* 64) and become repressive in their constraint of our horizons. Unless the intent is to apply direct force or coercion, it is not feasible to so thwart escape or resistance without providing compensation—particularly, a kind of compensation that is immediately gratifying (Marcuse *One-Dimensional* 71-2). By giving us what we want in highly managed ways, we are habituated to acceptance: our desires, by being readily incorporated into administered cultures, retain their potent sense of reward (74-5). In this way, repressive desublimation ensures "satisfaction in a way which generates submission and weakens the rationality of protest" (75). This perspective accords with Suvin's objections to fantasy's tendencies toward co-option and also delineates the role of desire in the process.

As fantastic narratives, and their themes and tropes, are mainstreamed, they are also codified: they develop their own status quo that dictates acceptable alterity and, paradoxically, demands conformity. The push toward the ideological is part of this

---

[25] Marcuse defines desublimation as the replacement of "mediated" with "immediate" forms of gratification (*One-Dimensional* 72), and in this context repressive desublimation serves the interests of the "repressive society" in securing compliance (75).

process of divesting the strange of its strangeness, and it becomes unclear whether or not it is still possible to communicate estrangement at all. To discuss alterity, there has to be the possibility for an alternative, but these alternatives are quickly and efficiently assimilated. Even in supposedly authentic explorations of alterity, the estrangements produced are reincorporated, reduced, repackaged, and sold back to us without any need to address content: the content can remain radical, but has its teeth pulled out, is contained and made safe.

However, Suvin's claim that fantasy delimits science fiction's radical potential does not appear to admit that the radical potential of both forms is constrained by the same processes, as we saw with the argument regarding fantasy's ideological features. It is in the best interests of capitalists to desublimate rather than repress wherever possible. And it is certainly true that many of these narratives are conducive to being exploited. But even the most radical and canonic science fiction can also be exploited. We must look at how repressive and "adjusted" desublimation acts on the entirety of imaginative fiction, and be cognizant in our analyses that we are not blaming the literature for aesthetic forms that not only affect all of art through the culture industry, but that also act on any attempts at the radical in art. These are not protected by virtue of their content. Issues of integrity and authenticity are relevant, with caution against the gatekeeping tendencies already present.

1.9.   From Disenchantment to Disalienation: Fantasy's Utopian Hopes

The primary arguments levelled against fantasy revolve around accusations of nostalgia, naïve romanticism, idealism, childishness, escapism. When viewed as such, fantasy does seem antithetical to a prevailing Marxist or critical point of view. Theorists thinking along these lines are pointing out the legitimate concern that the things we enjoy can and will be used against us. However, there is an overbearing insistence in these approaches that art be made utilitarian, the idea that its purpose is *solely* to offer an alternative, which is then judged in terms of its success or failure in accomplishing this objective. In his essay "Lucid Dreams, or Flightless Birds on Rooftops?" Istvan Csicsery-

Ronay, Jr., states that "few thinkers on the Left are used to thinking of fantasy as a positive concept that requires no justification; and fewer still are comfortable with it as a generic category of art" (291). There is an assumption that the imagination—and perhaps by extension, those employing it—is vulnerable, insecure, weak, susceptible to manipulation (Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. 288), with tremendous pressure to adopt a pragmatic approach and a tendency to "treat the imagination as a tool" (301). There is a moralizing aspect where fantasy, and the fantastic in general, is perceived as "the incapacity of making things real" (Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. 302). But Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., rejects the requirement that art be made to provide actual alternatives, which can descend into art as propaganda (294).

This denial of enjoyment, and consequent mandate that speculative fiction either provide realistic salvation or else drearily articulate our approaching doom, reflects the kind of dour approach that can dissuade people from engaging with criticism on the left: as if sucking the joy out of everything were somehow a necessary part of critique, and making our lives smaller and meaner served some essential function of objective truth. Along with this narrow attitude is a corresponding sense that we need to apologize for any interest in fantasy. The demand that we always refocus on utilitarian concerns is a mistake and will not effectively counter the evocative and compelling images and narratives coming from the reactionary right. The stories told by those on the left must be equally compelling, but they must also be more. Our stories are not mere tactics. Though it seems to be up for debate, there is room here for imagination, desire, and playfulness, however mercurial it may seem.

There remains the question, however, of whether or not fantasy can be genuinely critical, or if there is something necessarily and fundamentally delusional about the uses of fantasy historically and culturally.[26] Fantasy does at least suggest a form of resistance: of not wanting to buckle down and accept the given reality.[27] An uneasiness with the literal and conceptual confines of capitalist modernity that keeps some part of the self

---

[26] This will be further expanded through the discussion of mystification in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

[27] Marcuse's "Great Refusal" in *One-Dimensional Man* (63) is relevant here.

intact. In this context, we begin to see, or at least feel, that "'[r]eal' life under capitalism *is a fantasy*" (Miéville "Editorial" 42): one that presents itself not just as reality, but as *realism*. In the vague, unformulated resistance conjured by our attraction to fantasy, there is a fundamental truth, an awareness of something once alive that we have lost and must recover.[28] Fantasy can be seen as an expression of a *sense* of loss, as "the sorrow of concern with something that has disappeared" (Marcuse *Negations* xx).

As a social phenomenon, fantasy's popularity tells us something important about its readers' hopes and longings. These are not just worlds that people want to escape to psychologically—they are often worlds that people want to live in, to recreate. This is not mere nostalgia. It is easy to disregard, but in doing so, we miss an opportunity to understand a potentially motivating social force. To what extent does fantasy create space for utopian hope? Miéville notes that "considerations of the fantastic have long been part of certain Marxist traditions" such as the Frankfurt School—he specifically mentions Benjamin and Bloch—and is central to surrealism ("Editorial" 40), and in these theoretical threads we can uncover some of the utopian hopes of fantasy. Though they present as uncertain and ill-defined, these longings are identifiable: they embody our desire for unalienated or disalienated life.[29]

In this sense, fantasy can be understood to be congruent with Marxism's utopian aspects. In *The Concept of Utopia*, Ruth Levitas differentiates the Marxist utopia from other utopias specifically in relation to the idea of disalienation: "Its goal lies not in a defined set of institutional arrangements but in the pursuit of another way of being; what is sought is disalienation" (7). By taking us to the premodern and the enchanted, fantasy is trying to describe unalienated existence, unalienated being. The impulse or need to do so is in response to what Max Weber, in "Science as a Vocation," identifies as disenchantment, where there are no longer "mysterious and incalculable forces" controlling reality, but instead it is possible to "master all things by calculation" (7). Processes of intellectualization and rationalization perform the functions that were

---

[28] This phrase, and idea, I have borrowed from Jerry Zaslove, and therefore credit him with gratitude.

[29] And also maybe the power to move things with our minds. But mostly disalienation.

previously addressed through "magical means" (Weber 7). In this way, science is "irreligious," with the desire for religious or mystical experience being broadened to a desire simply for experience (9).

Jameson acknowledges this association between religion and experience, with religion as representing "unalienated human creativity which has then been re-alienated into an image or figural form" ("Radical" 278). In fantasy, Jameson sees magic as a stand-in for religion, "a figure for the enlargement of human powers and their passage to the limit, their actualisation of everything latent and virtual in the stunted human organism of the present" (278). It should be noted here that these magical powers are not necessarily reified and can indicate a reclaiming of creative and productive powers by the individual, depending once again on the content of the narrative. Like religion, fantasy taps into an obscured sense of non-alienated being. And like religion, it most often has a historical sense in terms of the loss of the premodern, in "the vision of an immense historical degradation and the end of the old world, the old society and the old ways [which is] everywhere in fantasy (and in myth itself)" (Jameson "Radical" 279). The dangers here regarding the romanticization and restoration of the ancien régime become quite valid: in religion, this is illustrated in the pull to fundamentalism, and in fantasy, it is present in the deservedly criticized pulp that regurgitates oppressive neofeudalism.[30]

While the connection to the premodern is meaningful, the dismissal of the genre on this basis does not hold. As with any other genre, a work can be kitsch or it can be insightful, and to a large extent this is dependent on the talent and skill of the author. A story can be both fantastic and profound; these are not mutually exclusive concepts. Radical fantasy should incorporate a critical understanding of the politics of domination that are present in the structures and ideologies of its own worlds, and how those relate to

---

[30] In objecting to fantasy based on its likeness to religion, I would note that major religious institutions have often not been fond of fantasy. One example would be the attempts of the Catholic Church to ban the 2007 film version of Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass* since Pullman is critical of organized religion in the series. Other religious objections, like those targeting J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, revolve simply around the presence of magic. In this context, I would point to a related deep historical persecution in the form of the Inquisition and the witch hunts. Fantasy could be posited as a quasi-religious competitor to organized religion, but a simple equivalence of fantasy, myth, and religion requires further examination.

those of the outside world. The goal of radical fantasy is to create worlds that are not alienated, or that show us the degree to which our own reality is alienated.

1.10. Alterity and Possibility: The Theoretical Construct of Miéville's *Not-Real*

Miéville supports the idea of a broad category of *the fantastic*, which is functional not simply by being broad but by enabling connections to historical and theoretical threads that are politically relevant, as fantasy is historical, even when inventive. In keeping with Attebery, I find the fantastic to be useful as a mode compared to fantasy as genre and would propose the term *imaginative fiction* as an alternative umbrella term to speculative fiction. Miéville has attempted to provide alternative frameworks based on ideas of possibility and alterity. In his editorial introduction to *Historical Materialism*'s "Symposium: Marxism and Fantasy," Miéville attempts not merely to respond to Suvinian demands, but to propose genuinely different ways of assessing and interpreting the genre and its content. And it must be noted that it is Miéville who leads the way here, as critic and author, striving for a new understanding of what it is he and others are doing when they set about writing fantasy.

Miéville delineates a general category of the *not-real* as a defining feature of the fantastic. Within the not-real, there exist three additional variations: the possible, the not-yet possible, and the impossible or never possible. The possible and the not-yet possible are forms of extrapolation (Miéville "Editorial" 44-6). This is the comfort zone of science fiction, partly due to its future-oriented approach, constituting attempts to imagine the outcomes of present choices and paths. Another element, however, is that science fiction, most especially hard science fiction, by definition frames its narratives within the given scientific rationality. When it strays too far from this framework, it becomes fantasy.[31] Fantasy is willing to navigate the impossible, which is in turn related to the irrational, to

---

[31] One could refer here to Arthur C. Clarke's three laws, particularly the last two: that "The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible," and that "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (21, 36).

unreason. Miéville thus claims that "the never-possible here is a function of the enlightenment, rationalist/scientific mindset of modernity" ("Editorial" 45).

He is right in tracing a conceptual line back to Enlightenment rationality and in indicating that modernity possesses a particular kind of rationalistic mentality, one that determines the possible. The fantastic can thus be seen as "sleight of mind" (Miéville "Editorial" 45), as a means to shift the boundaries of the not-real, and by extension, the real: "changing the not-real allows one to think differently about the real, its potentialities and actualities" (46). A critical theory of the not-real would be, essentially, a theory of possibility. The ways in which we conceptualize the possible define its boundaries. This means that the boundaries of the possible are fluid and may be informed not only by the not-yet possible, but by the impossible. Thinking the impossible serves to stretch the boundaries of what is conceivable, which can in turn alter the real. This amounts to a change in consciousness that can also inform praxis.

Miéville refers directly to Marx with the example of the bee and the architect taken from *Capital*.[32] He uses this example to illustrate that there is a conceptual cross-reference between the real and the not-real: "the model I take from Marx differs from the mainstream critics in that the not-real isn't *separated* from the real. The real is shaped *by a process of constant reference to the not-real*. Our conception of what is and is not possible directly affects our transformative capacity" (in Newsinger 6). Our comprehension of the impossible is dependent on our definition of the possible, and we think of the possible first—it is privileged. Furthermore, they interact in a dialectic, the cross-reference.

In conceptualizing a similar dynamic, Le Guin characterizes science fiction as fantastic, as fantasy first and foremost, which is "stimulated by and extrapolated from scientific fact" ("Do-It-Yourself" 112) and simply offers new objects for consideration. But there is an attempt to make it seem real, or as close to real as possible, while with fantasy there is movement "away from the rational" (Le Guin "Do-It-Yourself" 113), though she notes that "[t]hose who dislike fantasy are very often equally bored or

---

[32] Miéville uses this example in both the "Symposium" introduction and in the Newsinger interview.

repelled by science" (Le Guin "Mondath" 16). Edward O. Wilson finds science and fantasy to be related and expansive rather than confined and limiting: "where scientific observation addresses all phenomena existing in the real world, scientific experimentation addresses all possible real worlds, and scientific theory addresses all conceivable real worlds, the humanities encompass all three of these levels and one more, the infinity of all fantasy worlds" (187). The degree to which we constrain the boundaries of the real and the not-real reflects a specific process of rationalization, and those examples which are most constrained also tend to be the most deterministic.

1.11. Rationalization, Value-Neutral Reason, and Opening Up Alternatives

In order to explain the effects of rationalization, I refer to Andrew Feenberg's work in the philosophy of technology. Feenberg explains that the adoption of rationalization into social and cultural spheres diminishes the "normative and qualitative richness" (130) of the former societal formations and results in "de-worlding" (151). In this sense, modern societies are fundamentally different from premodern ones, not only as a matter of scale, but with a greater divergence in how the world is conceptualized and experienced (131, 137). This he relates to the *cultural horizon* of modernity—the horizon signifying what is conceptually possible. At present, our horizon is one of "technological hegemony" (16) where "modern societies construct and destroy worlds and their associated identities at the rhythm of technological change" (xviii). The progress of modernity has historically and continues to entail the wholescale destruction of worlds, of societies, and these are not valueless. We cannot pretend that nothing, or nothing worth saving, has been lost.

The process of rationalization in modernity is inextricably linked to capitalism. For this reason, the Frankfurt School has emphasized the idea of total administration in late capitalism. Under total administration, technocratic rationality dominates not just systems but also consciousness. Nothing is exempt from being co-opted, decontextualized, and used by capitalism (Feenberg 170). Even our thoughts are assimilated and put to work. In many ways, it is total administration that explains both

our attraction to idealized visions of the premodern and the fact that these visions most often become folded back into affirmative culture. Total administration implies that our escapes are never *real escapes*, and function therapeutically as measures of adjustment. Due to the pervasiveness of rationalization and total administration, our ideas regarding what constitutes progress can be problematic, with productivist ideals that imply a certain linearity to progress—one in which the premodern is devalued—posing concerns regarding what kind of rationality is dominant. Under the regime of technocratic rationalization, too much has been relegated to the realm of the impossible, and too many ways of being have been invalidated. This is not just homogenization: it is a genocide of possible worlds. The greatest irony is that this occurs in a time of technological advancement that does seem to make the impossible possible. And yet, as technology advances, our social and cultural alternatives continue to diminish, to be diminished. The world itself is diminished, exploited, used up, the life in it exterminated.[33] These losses are vast and meaningful, and are seen as the cost of progress.

When the process of rationalization is contextualized within the specific historical development of the debates around modernity—and the corresponding debates regarding fantasy in which this thesis is grounded—it becomes apparent that "progress is not reducible to a succession of rational choices because criteria of rationality are themselves in flux" (Feenberg 37). This does not mean that there is no rationality; it means that our conceptions of rationality are not objectively determined, but occur in relationship to social and cultural forces, and respond to those forces. This has important implications that are far-reaching but not necessarily obvious: that our current form of technocratic rationality has been determined by choices between *viable alternatives*, and thus other forms of rationality have historically been possible and continue to be possible.

The argument that is typically made when one wants to examine alternatives that may have existed in the premodern is the rather flippant assertion that one wants to go back in time, which is usually followed by a series of jokes about diseases and lack of

---

[33] Loss of cultures, languages, musics, entire peoples and ways of life; along with the loss of species and ecosystems, sometimes before we have even had the chance to explore and understand them, in this new period of mass extinction. The stakes of limiting the horizon of imagination and possibility can now be considered existential in the face of our own potential extinction.

hygiene.[34] This tactic presents a false dichotomy: we must either reject all the advances of modernity and live in hermit huts in the woods,[35] or we must accept capitalist modernity as is, perhaps with some adjustments and reforms, or at least accept its costs as unavoidable. A more profound objection is that going backward constitutes, for many of us, a return to intolerable forms of oppression. A third option—that we can examine our history critically as a series of choices and use that information to make other choices; that there can be radically different configurations of modernity—is rarely taken seriously. It is subject matter for fiction, not politics. This once again emphasizes the important role of fantasy in shifting consciousness, since it can be an arena in which people are first thinking about alternate societal possibilities.

What we are looking for is an opening up of alternatives, rather than a closing of possibility through deterministic constrictions, while recognizing the ongoing debates regarding ideas of the utopian and the rational. This is something that needs to happen in life, in the material and political spheres, but also in the imaginary. It may be that the change in the imaginary needs to happen first: we are less likely to work for or create something different unless we can imagine something different. This is the purpose of the critical utopia, though it is not restricted to utopian thought. The significance of fantasy is not that it creates a utopian scheme to follow, but simply that it is "*good to think with*" (Miéville "Editorial" 46). Miéville points out that "[t]he notion of fantasy as embedding potential transformation and emancipation in human thinking is of direct political and aesthetic interest to Marxists" (46). This is an idea that is underrated in theoretical considerations of the impact of fantasy. Miéville makes the strong claim that "[n]o matter how commodified and domesticated the fantastic in its various forms might be, we need fantasy to think the world, and to change it" ("Editorial" 48). This is effectively a utopian project, but it is one of changing consciousness, of redefining *being*, asking that we renegotiate our understanding of what is possible.

---

[34] The disease argument takes on new relevance during COVID-19. Who has not been reading the snippets of Samuel Pepys' diary, circulated as memes, describing plague quarantine? *Plus ça change*.

[35] Not that there is anything wrong with that. I often want to live in a hermit hut in the woods. I would just like it to have internet.

The perception that the world is something to be dominated is a crucial component of technical rationality. Utilitarian explanations do not merely take precedence, they become the only valid way of knowing. The problem is that under capitalism, it becomes difficult to distinguish appearance from actuality. We are not party to the inner workings of capitalism, and under the rationality of late capitalism, we cannot even conceptualize, let alone identify and articulate, the manner of our domination. We are assured that all we have left behind in the past is superstition and ignorance, and the very construction of rationality we use to confirm these claims is the same one that has created them. And this is seen as coming from an objective stance due to the assumption of value-neutral reason. But reason is not value-neutral: there is no human objectivity that is externalized and disengaged from societal constructs,[36] which means that "its apparent neutrality is in fact a bias toward domination" (Feenberg 206). The adoption of supposedly value-neutral reason serves the purpose of bolstering technocratic hegemony and of stripping the value from dissenting voices. At the same time, people are aware that under modernity they are missing content. The desire for social relations that are life-affirming makes backward-looking romanticism genuinely make sense, but it does not serve to solve the problems of modernity. We all know, deep down, that there is no going back.[37]

This is one of the most consequential roles of fantasy in offering a radical critique. Fantasy can certainly perpetuate oppressive constructs, and science fiction can imagine non-oppressive societies. I would argue that part of the attraction to fantasy is the sense that there is at least an attempt to get at the life-affirming aspects of premodern societies, or, put more generally, at the life-affirming aspects of non-alienated worlds. The dialectic between the imagination and the rational mind—the cross-reference between the not-real and the real—reveals truths about reality that require an expansion of thought, an

---

[36] The turn to technology as a means of providing this objectivity produces the same underlying problem in embedded biases in design. This has been demonstrated in, for example, racial biases in facial recognition software, or in multiple attempts to teach AI chatbots through social media sites that have quickly degenerated toward reproducing racism and misogyny, and other similar issues in machine learning.

[37] As said, many of us would not want to go back to worse conditions of oppression, though this argument can be oversimplified. The recreation of previous inequities should not be the goal of a radical leftist critique.

expansion from one-dimensionality. Furthermore, there is an interrelationship with history and memory, with experience. We know things that are not encompassed within the scope of technical rationality, things that refer to the not-yet possible or the impossible, to potentiality. When viewed through accepted forms of rationalization, this kind of knowledge is irrational, but as Marcuse has said, "[t]he more blatantly irrational the society becomes, the greater the rationality of the artistic universe" (*One-Dimensional* 239). The move to incorporate art's rationality entails a shift away from value-neutral reason to a reason that recognizes not only its connection to social processes, but to the values and experiences that inform it—toward Miéville's conception of a rich, situated rationality. The imaginative process here is not infecting reason with irrationality, it is serving to disclose knowledge that is at the heart of human experience and human potential. This is how I would describe the crux of Miéville's argument regarding fantasy and the not-real: to wrest content and truth from the real through imaginative leaps that cross the boundaries of the possible and the impossible.

1.12. The Romanticist Critique and Romanticism as Worldview

We thus return to the principle of romanticism as a worldview and the critique it offers. Löwy and Sayre adhere to the view that romanticism is a "contradictory phenomenon" (1). They observe that many scholars have attempted to strip the romantic of its political content, referring only to literary and aesthetic phenomena as contrasted with those of classicism. Those who have addressed political concerns have tended to accentuate the "conservative, reactionary, and counterrevolutionary aspect" (5), disregarding the more revolutionary currents. If we follow this approach to its extreme, we end up with the argument that romantic views are intrinsically fascist-leaning and will inevitably condition us for fascism, and therefore we must resolutely reject them. Given the horrors of fascism, any critique of reason seems dangerous, and any embrace of that deemed irrational seems unwise, since we are now treading in such strong reactionary currents against reason. However, these positions on romanticism require the active exclusion of important romantic trends that stand in opposition to such tendencies (Löwy and Sayre 7).

Löwy and Sayre suggest that we can make sense of romanticism's contradictions by seeing it as a "worldview" or "weltanschauung" (7), as a "collective mental structure" (14). The more common view is that romanticism simply represents a form of "counter-Enlightenment" (Löwy and Sayre 8); and yet, an emphasis on the superiority of progress-oriented critiques "betrays a prejudice inherited from the Enlightenment" (11). The focus on a particular version of progress is also tied to a similar emphasis on realism, and both together make up a significant proportion of Marxist objections to romanticism (Löwy and Sayre 11-12). Romantic thought, in both its right and left types, is anti-capitalist. As a worldview, romanticism is "coextensive with capitalism itself" and as such is still relevant as a critique; it "continues to speak to us" because the crises of capitalism are fundamental to modernity (Löwy and Sayre 17). The romantic critique occurs "in the name of the values and ideals drawn from the past (the precapitalist, premodern past)" (17), with a characteristic "contradiction … between two systems of values" (18). The emphasis on conflicting values and a clash of worldviews differentiates this critique and points to an elemental incompatibility, though the question of competing values can be overlooked in criticism.

Löwy and Sayre propose the idea of *critical irrealism* as a fundamental aspect of romanticism. Here, they refer to the presence of the fantastic in the Romantic as providing a radical critique and utopian alternative formed in the not-real:

> In fact, many Romantic or neo-Romantic works are intentionally non-realist: they are fantastic, symbolist, or, later on, surrealist. Yet this does not lessen their interest, both as critique of social reality and dream of an other world, radically distinct from the existing one: quite the contrary. One would have to introduce a new concept that might be called "critical irrealism" to designate the opposition between a marvelous, imaginary, ideal, utopian world and the gray, prosaic, inhuman reality of the modern world. Even when it takes the superficial form of a flight from reality, this critical irrealism can contain a powerful implicit or explicit negative charge challenging the philistine bourgeois order. It is owing to their character of critical irrealism that not only writers such as Novalis and E.T.A. Hoffmann but also utopians and revolutionaries such as Charles Fourier, Moses Hess, and William Morris contributed an essential dimension to Romanticism, as worthy of attention from an emancipatory standpoint as the implacably realist lucidity of a Balzac or a Charles Dickens. (Löwy and Sayre 12)

Löwy and Sayre are making a significant critical and aesthetic connection between romanticism and fantastic literature. The feature of critical irrealism is precisely that which allows the fantastic as a mode its revolutionary potential, even when other features such as escapism are observed. The association between romanticism and the fantastic is not casual but integral.

More than perhaps any other quality, romanticism is characterized by a profound sense of loss and alienation:

> The Romantic critique is bound up with an experience of loss. The Romantic vision is characterized by the painful and melancholic conviction that in modern reality something precious has been lost, at the level of both individuals and humanity at large; certain essential human values have been alienated. This alienation, keenly sensed, is often experienced as exile. (Löwy and Sayre 21)

We intuit, but cannot necessarily identify, that something is missing, and want to return to a home or feeling of home that has perhaps never really existed, or which remains only as fragments. Our spirits are in exile. This is interpreted as nostalgia for the premodern, but as Marx and Engels observe, is "'closely linked' to the critique of the capitalist world" (Löwy and Sayre 22). The conservative impulse here is to recreate the past as it was; the radical impulse is to create the world as it could have been, and might yet still be.[38]

Romanticism tends to incorporate the idealization of the individual, which is often accompanied by nostalgia, but when combined with its utopian elements, this explains how it can be simultaneously backward- and forward-looking. The utopian "quest" for an ideal world can be described as an "active principle" of romanticism (Löwy and Sayre 22). This quest can be "imaginary" or "real," and can be realized in the present or the future (23). In the imaginary present, it can be expressed in its "poeticization or aestheticization" (23). In this aspect romanticism is closely allied with the fantastic. The "active principle" of the search for the good life, the alternate reality, in the imagination "can be manifested by the emergence of the supernatural, the fantastic, the oniric [sic], or,

---

[38] I credit the latter part of this statement once again to Jerry Zaslove, discussed in relation to Benjamin's concept of allegory ("Personal").

in certain works of art, by the tonality of the sublime" as a "utopian projection" (Löwy and Sayre 23). The element of utopianism in romanticism informs us that there is more at stake than mere nostalgia, and it is this utopian aspect of the romanticist critique that is most relevant to views of critical fantasy.

The romanticist critique amounts to a vision of and search for what has been lost and should be recovered. Löwy and Sayre define this as articulating the "positive values of Romanticism" (24), which they determine to be: first, the *individual* subject, which comes with "the full freedom of its imaginary" and is therefore "the source of a major contradiction," as the individual then resists the alienation and reification engendered by capitalist society; and second, as its paired opposite, *unity/totality*, which includes a collective or "transindividual dimension" (25). Romanticism attempts to reconcile the private world of the individual with the idea of a whole or totality that has been alienated and fragmented. The romanticist critique can thus be described as paradigmatic[39] as it expresses not simply a position but a worldview, with associated values.

Furthermore, Löwy and Sayre claim that it comprises one of three main types of critiques of capitalism: the romantic, the modernizing, and the reactionary (28-9). The modernizing critique characterizes the more prevalent readings of Marxism (29), and I argue this comprises one of the main reasons for the rejection of fantasy in Marxist criticism, which at the same time lacks articulation of the implicit system of values. And both must be differentiated from the reactionary critique, which has shared features with romanticism such as nostalgia while simultaneously embracing elements of capitalist modernity but is too often simply conflated with the romantic critique. If most Marxist critiques of fantasy fall into the modernizing category—or are simply lacking due to this same factor—this then explains the preference for science fiction over fantasy.

One of the strengths of the romanticist critique is its value focus, and fantasy as genre makes sense as a totality only when viewed through the lens of romanticism as worldview. Its historical development as a genre is embedded in the Romantic, and this helps us understand what fantasy *is*; however, without the inclusion of the romanticist

[39] Attributed to Jerry Zaslove ("Personal").

critique of capitalism, we cannot properly understand what it is that fantasy *does*. Romanticism provides the theoretical background necessary to understand the impulse behind fantasy as genre, as well as its contradictions. We can understand fantasy's role as a response to capitalist modernity and the sense of loss and alienation it engenders, and that this response can be reactionary or radical. And we can understand fantasy in all its forms as representing the romanticist critique of capitalism in the realm of the imagination, inviting us to reconsider the limits of what is possible. Romanticism as worldview will be reconsidered in chapter 4. Prior to that, the gothic and mythic orientations of fantasy are explored, beginning with the gothic.

Chapter 2.

Rupture (The Gothic)

Something is missing, something is wrong. The world changed, and we became alienated from it, abstracted. The wrongness manifests as monsters. The monsters are imaginary, but the monstrosity is not. The monstrosity is historical but is also a process of rupture and estrangement that occurs where and when capitalism is introduced. There is a disruption that can both enclose and disclose. In fantasy literature, this appears in works that follow a gothic orientation: the weird, the uncanny, the grotesque and carnivalesque.

The transition to capitalism can be viewed historically, and the traces of these historical developments appear in the literature of the fantastic. The gothic orientation of romanticism represents the rupturing of previous cultural and communal forms and the resulting estrangement in the horror of its monsters: its ghosts, vampires, and zombies. In this chapter I refer to David McNally's capitalist grotesque as a key idea explaining the dispossession and disembodiment, abstraction and alienation, and monstrosity of capitalism, as well as its enclosures and confinement, with José Monleón's Gothic fantastic offering insight on expressions of the fantastic in literature and its manifestations of unreason as extensions of material and psychological enclosures. I then turn to Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of the grotesque and carnivalesque as containing the memory of a second life in medieval carnival and festive life, existing outside of and in opposition to the official life. This is developed into the idea of fantasy as a refuge for the second life, but one that is disembodied: a refuge in the imagination, preserved through the autonomy of art.

2.1. Severance and Dissection: The Capitalist Grotesque

In *Monsters of the Market*, David McNally argues that gothic monstrosity reflects dispossession from the commons through enclosures and the forced transition to wage labour. He highlights the associated history of public anatomy and dissection as central to

the process of severance, which he connects directly to monster stories and the notions of alienation and disembodiment that figure prominently in the gothic style. Through these processes of dissection and dismemberment, the proletarian body becomes characterized as monstrous.

McNally presents the "capitalist grotesque" as invisible and insidious, and as most easily seen in environments it is just starting to colonize (2). This colonization can be seen in fantastic monster stories in literature and popular culture, which relate to historical practices but are also "symbolic registers" of anxiety (3). Capitalism, however, is rarely named overtly in its exploitation of our "life-energies" (3); this denial means that it shows up in culture. McNally contends that monster stories, particularly those about bodily dismemberment, are a direct response to commodification (4). They replicate the psychic severing that occurs through alienation, but also catalogue the material bodily harm inflicted by capitalism. The fantastic therefore gives shape to the "demonic power" of "the unseen operations of capital," and makes visible that which is often not expressed in other genres (McNally 7). The invisibility of the market is recognized as "*fantastically real*" (7), and in this characterization McNally is consistent with Miéville's comment that capitalism is a fantasy. Since fantasy can disturb this continuity and normalization, McNally advises that critical theory should be aligning itself with fantasy (7) rather than promoting antagonism.

In theoretical discussions of fantasy, the idea of disenchantment figures prominently, but disembodiment is also an important consideration, and is part of what motivates the need or impulse toward reconnection. Abstract, commodified labour necessitates a fundamental "restructuring of human experience" (McNally 15). McNally's examination of public anatomy and dissection is crucial to understanding this process of alienation, abstraction, and severance, and he demonstrates how the deliberate exploitation, abuse, and control of the proletarian body has been translated into a resistance to science and scientific practice. Dissection was not just about pursuing scientific objectives but was deliberately "a means of disciplining and punishing proletarian bodies" (McNally 19), with the spectacle of public anatomy as "an aesthetics of domination" (27) restructuring the social order.

This restructuring was dependent on enclosure, as demonstrated in the enclosures of the English commons which, along with colonization, was a prerequisite for capitalism's expansion and dominance and constituted an ideological formation accompanied by rupture and severance in social spheres (McNally 37). At the same time, resistance was characterized as "a monstrous threat to societal well-being" (42) which required enclosure in material, social, and mental spheres. The non-enclosed body has a different relationship to the self; to the rooted, concrete, land-based sense of self. This is contrasted with the bourgeois sense of self as "an enclosed, individuated personality," with the non-enclosed body, or public body, becoming viewed as grotesque (McNally 43).

The enclosures entailed a reformulation of largely patriarchal peasant social structures in a new reorganization of class and gender, with the bourgeois male as the enclosed, individual owner of property and owner, possessor, and appropriator of rights (McNally 44).[40] The common or public body became naturalized, "feminised and animalised, treated as a deficient type" (44) making up a "female grotesque" (258) that was hyper-embodied; it was also "demonised" (44) and racialized (258-9). This characterization was reaffirmed by women's involvement in anti-enclosure riots and resistance (44). The English witch trials often related directly to women's resistance to enclosures and their "insistence on communal obligations" (45). Through the torment of accused witches and the imposition of increasingly fixed and repressive gender relations, elites were engaging in assaults on communal formations and practices, while simultaneously linking these formations to the "monstrous women" under attack (45).

In the resistance to these onslaughts against the communal, the "restoration of the commons" became a touchpoint for utopian thinking and radical action which could be further politicized into riots or rebellions (McNally 47).[41] This was countered with moral arguments for enclosure, which served to internalize it as an ideological frame. Under the

---

[40] Though there have certainly been unequal relations and exploitation in premodern and non-capitalist societies, including in relation to land ownership and resource distribution, what is severed under capitalism is the direct connection to land for subsistence, restructuring the social as well as the economic (McNally 148-9).

[41] McNally references, amongst others, The Diggers.

sway of the Protestant ethic, work was seen as the cure for the laziness and "insubordination" of the poor (McNally 48), who were met with the criminalization of customary practices as well as protest and organizing, and an expansion of policing and the prison system (50). Enclosure extended beyond the dispossession of land to comprise systematic confinement (60). In this way, confinement became another feature of the gothic response to capitalism.[42]

With this understanding of the gothic character of fantasy derived from the capitalist grotesque, we can see how in this context, magic constituted a refusal of work, reinforcing its targeting through the witch trials as well as its moral condemnation. Silvia Federici notes that the annihilation of a medieval magical worldview "was a necessary condition for the capitalist rationalization of work, since magic appeared as an illicit form of power and an instrument to *obtain what one wanted without work*" (142). The magical view of the world could be described as suffused with living and unpredictable forces and included the attempt to "'manipulate'" or "'placate'" those forces; it therefore was practiced by "mostly poor people who struggled to survive, always trying to stave off disaster" (Federici 173). Federici uses prophecy as an example of the use of magic by the poor to articulate unmet needs and desires as well as inspire resistance, and as such is an indication of a latent utopian impulse (143). It does not matter if "these powers were real or imaginary" (142) since they were part of the worldview. These ideas of magic entail a rejection of the work ethic and its associated discipline, and the centrality of magic to fantasy can therefore indicate an underlying resistance that has survived. Magic does not appear as threatening today due to the internalization of work discipline, but Federici asserts that in the 17th century "the very existence of magical beliefs was a source of social insubordination" (143), making disenchantment necessary to capitalism's domination (173-4).

The internalization of enclosure can be seen in public discourse and in literature. Competing narratives emerged regarding the monstrous: for the poor, the monstrous

---

[42] McNally's position regarding enclosure, resistance, criminalization, and confinement is supported by Federici's and is reiterated by Monleón referencing Foucault's great confinement, as discussed later in this chapter. For a further accounting of the commons, of the enclosures, and of resistance to enclosure, please see Peter Linebaugh.

market; for the rich, the "monstrosity in the mob" (McNally 59), creating competing nightmare scenarios engulfed in fear. Monstrosity became secularized, where the monster no longer appeared as supernatural but as human (60). The "rabble" was to be restrained through order and authority (71).[43] The reactionary Romantic discourse in England, particularly in response to the French Revolution, was exemplified by Edmund Burke (McNally 77), who "mobilised standard tropes about the monstrous mob" (McNally 78). Burke employed the "motifs" of Gothic literature, incorporating its alienating, uncanny elements, but in a "reversal" where the bourgeois "dissectors" became the focus (McNally 80). Reversals and doublings themselves constitute gothic motifs and point to their presence as a central aspect of the occult economy.

McNally turns to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a literary example of the gothic. The fateful weekend that produced two monster exemplars in Frankenstein's creature and the modern vampire, through Polidori's *The Vampyre* (McNally 12), is a touchpoint for fantasy as genre. Both texts are foundational to gothic fantasy, with *Frankenstein* as similarly key to science fiction. *Frankenstein* explores the exploitation of the bodies of the poor for the purposes of science, progress, and instrumentalization (McNally 12), as well as class relations as they are internalized within the characters (McNally 89), depicting the inner tensions of the enclosed, individual bourgeois self while also externalizing the Romantic nightmare of the monstrous revolution.[44] *Frankenstein* is not simply a denunciation of science, but of the individual's severance from responsibility to others and to the natural world (McNally 93). It depicts alienation as well as the crystallization of the bourgeois subject. The creature's self-identification as a monster, as "the inhuman human," represents the "negation of bourgeois distinction" (McNally 103) and takes the monster out of the mob. The creature possesses intelligence, sensitivity, and

---

[43] McNally refers specifically to Francis Bacon as an example, with his intent to "tame the unruly English mob" and rationalize colonialism (71).

[44] There are tensions in Shelley's position here relating to what McNally calls the "Godwinian liberalism" (93) of her politics, which he addresses. McNally also comments on Shelley's exploration of gender and class, where she articulates the unequal relations in which fantasy will become mired in the Victorian period. The Victorian entrenchment of the patriarchal bourgeois family unit as a means through which women and social reproduction is made invisible, and where the domestic sphere, and nature by extension, is enlisted to soften the harsh edges of reason and provide comfort, is mirrored in the development of fantasy. This will be explored later in this thesis.

the same desire for emotional connection as any person, and Shelley forces the reader to relate to the monster, disallowing the distance that would objectify him.[45]

2.2.   The Ghosts of Abstraction and the Vampires and Zombies of Occult Capitalism

Distance and alienation are created through capitalism's abstraction, which takes on an occult quality. Through Marx, McNally outlines the idea of the "occult economy" and the "obscure transactions" of capital and labour (113). Marx and Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto*, observe that bourgeois society is losing its grip on the relations of production and exchange it has "conjured up," becoming "like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells" (10). Under late capitalism, the increased penetration of capital beyond the physicality of the labouring body to mental and cultural spheres, as well as its continuing and deepening obscuration through processes such as financialization, makes the need for an autonomous imaginative space even greater—even though these same processes create the increased risk of that space being co-opted. This magnifies the importance of identifying and naming capitalism's invisible monsters as a "counter-magic to the sorcery of capital," specifically its illusions (McNally 114).

Capitalism creates not only estrangement but an upside-down world that unnerves and confuses. We have already seen estrangement as central to Suvinian-type conceptions, but I propose that configurations of the upside-down world appear in much broader contexts in fantasy than simply that of estrangement, as the underground or underworld.[46] Understanding occult capitalism's upside-downness as a distortion, as shaping an "alienated, topsy-turvy world" with its regularized "capitalist inversions," (McNally 116) is useful in finding ground under our feet. Any effective theoretical

---

[45] McNally also refers to the sailors' mutiny in *Frankenstein* as an example of popular resistance movements (106-7). This is specifically relevant to Miéville's floating community in *The Scar*, and the existence of radical social and political formations and revolutionary action on ships in the 17th and 18th centuries could be further explored in Linebaugh and Rediker's *The Many-Headed Hydra*.

[46] Conceptions of the upside-down world and the underground will be expanded in the discussion of Bakhtin.

approach should be conversant with estrangement and with "a dialectical language of doublings and reversals" (McNally 116) and "displacements" where truth is reached through an oppositional "thing or agent" (120). The "doubled structure of the commodity" is that of use-value and exchange-value, with exchange-value denoting "an invisible, immaterial quality of commodities" (121) that lacks physical or material limits. Fantasy, in its use of the impossible, may be trying to represent something of this process: that things are not only not what they seem, but that things are not what they are. There is cognitive dissonance created in the meeting of illusion and displacement, where one is not necessarily distinguishable from the other, and notions of the real lose their meaning.

Real abstraction is therefore a process through which the embodied, sensuous world becomes populated by ghosts. McNally explains that through real abstraction, the commodity is suffused with value as an "invisible substance," and labour is similarly transmuted from the concrete to the abstract (123). Real abstraction is thus a kind of alchemical process[47] whereby "the very life-activity of workers is detached, or abstracted from them" (123).[48] Through real abstraction, commodities lose their "sensuous qualities" (124) and transition to "the spectral world of value" (125). McNally uses Marx's characterization of value as "'phantom-like'" which must be embodied or possessed through the commodity and through labour and the labourer (126), in which commodity fetishism becomes "a religion of *non-sensuous* desire" (127).[49]

The ghosts of abstraction also possess the subject. The liberal subject, as an "ideal type," is an abstraction, lacking content (McNally 127) and encompassing a "contempt for the concrete, the sensuous and the embodied" (128-9). Abstraction, in this context, results in "the flight from the real" in terms of the distance from concrete, sensuous

[47] Reference to figurative alchemical transmutations can be employed in a contrasting manner, toward radical means: for instance, in her introduction to Benjamin's *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt comments on the critic as alchemist, "watching and interpreting the historical process that brings about such magical transfiguration" (5). The use of evocative, magical language is not accidental here, nor is it in Marx and Engels, and reaffirms the attention to the gothic emphasis on doublings and reversals.

[48] McNally comments on the root of the term abstraction as indicating separation and detachment (123).

[49] Marx and Engels use spectral imagery in *The Communist Manifesto* but claim it for communism as the "spectre" that is "haunting Europe" (2), employing gothic motifs to clarify rather than obscure—and showing that it is possible to do so, as it is in fantasy. Value as phantom appears in Marx's *Capital*, volume 1, chapter 1.

experience (McNally 131), and this further explains how capitalist realism is itself fantasy and mystification. In relation to fantastic literature, this can be interpreted as a need for realism at fantasy's expense, a demand for groundedness in the material and concrete. But where this realism and extrapolation mimic the logic of abstraction, they end up divorced from the sensuous, embracing the frame of rationalism and associated instrumentalization. The accusations of flight or escapism in fantasy miss the target when these narratives represent attempts to re-engage with some version of embodied life.[50] The unreal and impossible in fantasy can reflect a double aspect of making mystification visible and invoking the sensuous. The subject does not identify with the ghosts of abstraction and may even perceive a need to exorcise them.[51]

Doublings can also be seen in the figure of the vampire. McNally uses Marx's description of "vampire-capitalism" (132) to refer to the possession of or by value as a "grotesque doubling" which entails the draining of "all sensibility and concreteness," and vampire imagery evokes exploitation and the parasitic relationship to living labour (140).[52] There is an underworld of production that has hidden, dark, invisible qualities (133-4). McNally maintains that Marx connects value to "corporeality" (134) and therefore he "*de-fetishises by way of re-embodiment*" (135). Marx's descriptions of working conditions are gothic (McNally 137-8), with spatial aspects of confinement and enclosure. The horror of the described spaces of production "is that they are sealed off

---

[50] Samir Gandesha and Johan Hartle, in their introduction to *Aesthetic Marx*, emphasize an aesthetic dimension in Marx's writing that highlights ideas of subjectivity and sensuous experience (xiii) as they relate to nature and species-being, with associated elements of play in a formulation of *homo ludens* (xviii-xix). This reading of Marx could be applied, in addition to gothic and literary readings of Marx, to illuminate a Marxist aesthetics more amenable to the romantic approach presented in this thesis.

[51] McNally observes that the anthropomorphism of money in stories and narratives, as occurred in 18th century English literature, appears to occur whenever capitalism is first encountered by a society (150). This is noted by McNally as a muddling of person and thing relating to commodification and monetization; but I would suggest that it is also an incorporation of money through what is essentially a fantastical or grotesque chimeric interpretation. It could be considered an initial attempt to reconcile money within an embodied worldview before abstraction overtakes the relation. The fantastical image would thus be an endeavour to integrate a new idea within the integrity of the existing worldview, which capitalism then mutilates through its own appropriation and occult characteristics.

[52] Marx uses vampire imagery in *Capital*, volume 1, chapter 10.

from life," clandestine crypts that hide from view the "capitalist underworld" of pain and suffering (McNally 138).

Zombie capital, in contrast, involves raising labour from the dead. Productive activity becomes a covert reanimation of past or dead labour, which in turn reifies or "deaden[s] the living" (McNally 141). Abstract time measures and directs that activity, and people become "bearers of undifferentiated life energies, dispensed in units of abstract time" (142), which McNally compares to zombification. Labour power, as a commodity, is "life-denying," but it is also a "living power, an energy, a *potential*" (146). The reification of lifeforce, of energy and time, ends up twisting the self. Bits of life become experienced as "alienable fragments of personhood, as dead things," and this happens in "'dead time'" that makes work "death-in-life" (McNally 147). People have resisted and continue to resist the living death of zombification and must be disciplined to accept it.

2.3. Financialization's Occult Speculation

The occult characteristics of capitalism are extended through financialization's use of speculation, with important implications regarding the schism in Marxist science fiction and fantasy criticism. Financialization involves the idea of "[s]elf-expansion … as an inherent property of money" (McNally 152). This relates to the lie that there are no limits, but also to the perception of the self: one expands oneself through production—by being productive, if a worker, or through profit if part of the ruling classes. To profit is to be self-generating, which has mythic or god-like qualities. The dependence of this process on labour is obfuscated (McNally 152). This is a trick, an attempt to gain sensuous spoils without the risk of harm or debasement posed by direct activity, using labour and labourers as sacrifices to that end while shrouding their ritual slaughter. Fictitious capital further obscures the process, as the link to reality itself, through the commodity, becomes tenuous (McNally 154-8). The self-generating capitalist enjoys the freedom of a "conjuror's realm of wild money," where their "cryptic world of enchanted wealth" (156) is as impenetrable as any magician's illusion and carries the same veil of mysterious power.

The speculative aspect of currency trading, and of derivatives, which are future-oriented, is based on labour that has not yet materialized (McNally 160-1). This serves to "monetise temporal shifts" (161) and to "translate concrete risks into quantities of *abstract risk*" (163). There is in this formulation an additional layer of abstraction which, when seen in conjunction with its relationship to time, indicates a speculative outlook that is world-determining. The kind of speculation involved in financialization only works if it is *predictive*; it relies on extrapolation. Since value is located in the future, its mediators are relied upon as prophets or seers, but they are actually cons engaging in self-fulfilling prophecy. Success in this predictive environment requires increasing levels of corruption in order to game the system and create the desired outcome. Prediction and extrapolation become a fix, a means of creating and manipulating futures: not just financial futures, but actual futures of people and things.

A speculative outlook therefore involves the perception of time and the self in relation to the environment in a cycle that is forward-looking, working to contrive certain futures while discarding others. While we always have choices between possibilities, and making choices necessarily means leaving others unmanifested, this form of speculation involves the enclosure of time through the liquidation of possible futures: it is not enough to exploit the present, the past and future(s) must also be emptied of resources. Capitalism's exploitation relies on a lack of limits or recognition of those limits, but it imposes limits on those it exploits, confining both spaces and opportunities. Grounding or embodiment in the present is impossible because value, and the self, are always located at a future point in time; the present self never exists except as a series of options or bets that must be maximized. The pursuit of godliness is abstracted as the unlimited self, and immortality as immateriality. The self becomes mere appearance or illusion, but always requires sacrificial labourers who are necessarily embodied in the present and who become the carriers of risk.[53] This results in disaster capitalism, where failure, chaos, and suffering are profitable if correctly predicted, and where revolutions and catastrophes simply require a reorientation of predictive capacities.

---

[53] We have seen this directly in the COVID-19 pandemic in the sacrifice of essential workers.

Within this context, it is not only the relation of the abstract and concrete that is important, but the element of time, of past and future, with the past—including past labour—as secured in the material and the real, available for zombie reanimation. In the maintenance of occult capitalism, it is important that embodiment be limited to the insensible experience of living death, as the recovery of more than dead labour from the past is dangerous, and the kindling of its living power and potential must be avoided. It is also important that the speculators of futures be distanced from the pseudo-corpse of the labouring body and thereby protected from the lurking violence of the mob.

Both fantasy and science fiction can incorporate aspects of this speculative outlook and pose risks to it. We have already seen through Miéville how fantasy can be a game. Speculation and extrapolation in science fiction can open up possibilities and futures or enclose them as described. The involvement of the imagination allows us to exist in worlds out of time and place without depleting them or ourselves. Fantasy's explorations of past and alternate worlds may remind us of the living power and potential that continues on within us.

2.4. Contemporary Enclosures and Monster Stories

The contemporary enclosures of globalization and neoliberal capitalism can therefore be connected to renewed interest in fantasy: we recognize similarities to previous enclosures but are faced with a double dispossession. We have not yet recovered from the dispossession of the commons or colonial dispossession, or from the imposition of waged labour and coerced labour, but must contend with new forms of primitive accumulation, often taking place invisibly or out of our ability to apprehend and comprehend. Primitive accumulation and the dispossession of land and resources, as currently happens largely in the global South, is often accomplished through the leveraging of debt, such as through structural adjustment policies (McNally 168). This enclosure of the "global commons" (170) is accompanied by monster stories and folktales that can be characterized as "disruptive fables of modernity" because they "disturb the naturalisation of capitalism … by insisting that something strange, indeed life-

49

threatening, is at work in our world" (McNally 5) and show "mistrust of the self-satisfied narratives of bourgeois culture" (16).

McNally uses examples of monster stories in newly exploited areas like those in South America, especially Indigenous areas, and describes one such story of the extraction of fat from people for industrial use (172).[54] These stories and fables provide significant insights that expose capitalism's exploitation and mark out points of resistance (172-3). Monster stories can show the potentiality "to reclaim life amid the morbid ruins of late capitalism"; they hint at the revolutionary potential of "carnivalesque insurgency," "disruption," and "rupture" (254). There are certain gratifications we receive from disruption and chaos, the schadenfreude of fantastic retribution; but there is also a "utopian charge" to these narratives (McNally 254). In collective resistance, there is movement toward "redemption and regeneration" and "revolutionary re-assemblage" (256), with recuperation as creating the conditions for "the recovery of memory, identity and history" (258), a process of recovery in both the sense of reclaiming what was lost, and in terms of a healing process. The utopian impulse that exists in story, and art in general, as well as in attempts at resistance, "prefigure the grotesque movements through which the collective labourer throws off its zombified state in favour of something new" (McNally 266). This utopian element offers an alternative view where restoration can be recovery through "reconnection with things in their concrete, sensuous, textured particularities," the "de-reification" and revitalization of the relationships between people and things (McNally 267). Contemporary monster stories, as continuations of the gothic, demonstrate how rupture in fantasy can be de-enclosing, exposing and confronting capitalism's ongoing degradations.

2.5. Confinement to and from the Margins: Spatial Aspects of the Gothic Fantastic

The grotesque and occult features of capitalism as they appear in literature and, more specifically, in the development of the novel, can be traced in the Gothic fantastic.

---

[54] I am reminded of the idea of dream extraction in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*.

José Monleón approaches the fantastic as it appears in Gothic literature within the French and European tradition, and organizes his analysis in *A Specter is Haunting Europe* using the French, 1848, and 1917 revolutions as defining and organizing events for the socio-historical understanding of fantastic literature,[55] with the Gothic novel emerging in the 18th century (30). He focuses on conceptions of reason and unreason, with Gothic romanticism[56] representing a contrast with "a society in which the principles of reason appear to shape nature" (6). The Gothic fantastic as genre, as proposed by Monleón, is the result of the incompatibility of medieval and bourgeois worldviews and the discord that came out of attempts to reconcile them, further influenced by the indeterminate boundaries between reason and unreason (6). Ultimately, bourgeois society required the banishment of the medieval and its "irrational and superstitious universe" (24). The Gothic fantastic therefore relies on bourgeois conceptions of the natural and its prerequisites are the objectification of nature and the de-naturalization of the supernatural, which constitutes a rupture from medieval worldviews (7-9). Monleón also cites fear as a primary component of the Gothic, with a close relationship to the uncanny (11-12).

Monleón argues that the Gothic fantastic is not inherently subversive nor an outlet for the repressed, but rather that it operates to shore up the status quo, which for him explains why it emerged after the establishment of bourgeois control (14). He uses the spaces and architecture in Gothic literature to make his point, since unreason is represented "within the symbols of feudalism" such as castles and abbeys (32).[57] Monleón's argument excludes much that might be garnered from rich traditions of myth, folktale, and fairy tale. He also takes an anti-romantic stance, making cursory reference to the populist or revolutionary romantic but otherwise arguing that romanticism in general, and the fantastic as an expression of it, did not represent the "'laboring and dangerous classes,'" who instead championed "not the cry of unreason, but rather the language of

---

[55] Monleón uses the general term fantastic to refer to the Gothic fantastic, which creates some confusion.

[56] Monleón describes the fantastic as "a special expression of romanticism" and distinguishes between the concept of irrationality in romanticism and the idea of unreason he uses; he stresses that irrationality "does not imply the negation of the principles of reason" that unreason does (142).

[57] The attention to space, architecture, and object will be picked up again with Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*.

reason" (Monleón 20). In this approach, Monleón seems largely consistent with the Suvinian paradigm.

Whether or not Gothic literature could be considered revolutionary, the importance to this discussion is the influence of gothic sensibilities on fantasy. Countering the insistence that the Gothic fantastic reaffirms bourgeois norms, texts like *Frankenstein* present a compelling contrast based in the challenges posed by modernity, where both reason (intelligence) and unreason (revenge) manifest in the form of the creature, who doubles his bourgeois creator. Monleón does acknowledge a shift in the Gothic fantastic that is seen first in *Frankenstein*, with movement from the specific, often medieval spatial locations emphasized in earlier Gothic literature to an internalization in the modern subject, with the figure of the outcast as the "banished or self-banished subject" prominent in Romantic literature (53).

Monleón derives his ideas of unreason from Michel Foucault's great confinement, as a means of concealing the unwanted (24-5). The underclasses make up an underworld, with a boundary demarcating the reasonable and productive from the proletarian mob, "the 'scum,' *la populace*, always ready to rob or riot" (Monleón 26). A "marginalized periphery" (29) bordered cities after the enclosures and dispossession from rural land and subsistence, as people were forced to migrate to find waged labour and then ejected from the reasonable society, pushed to the margins, the periphery, the liminal space between urban and rural, modern and feudal. This became not only a physical assignation, but a social and moral one, the periphery of unreason where madness, crime, and poverty converged (Monleón 29). Monleón describes Gothic literature as presenting death and unreason in spaces of confinement (33). The periphery is where the anxieties of the Gothic were located, making up a "dangerous universe inhabited by monstrous beings [that] encircled civilization" in "an alien but proximate world" (34). Monleón observes that it is through the monster that unreason is able to enter and disrupt bourgeois order, but that this is reliant on the "monster's conceptual proximity" (35). The French Revolution became "the threat par excellence of unreason" (38). In this way, unreason and the fantastic are directly connected to revolution (38-9).

The attempt to separate, portion off, confine, does not eradicate but fuels the nightmare. Monleón claims that there is "continuity" between reason and unreason, that unreason comes from reason itself (41), and that the "bourgeois world actually produced its own menacing monsters" (42). This idea is seen in Marx and Engels, where capitalism produces not only its own monsters but "its own grave-diggers" (20).[58] Gothic fear consisted of "a present sieged by negation of the past and the threat of the future" (Monleón 44); these fears included a tacit acknowledgment that reason and progress are not guaranteed and could be revoked (45). But Monleón maintains that by revealing unreason, the Gothic fantastic allowed society to domesticate it (48), a claim I argue is not wholly applicable to fantasy or the fantastic.

Confinement was also necessary to the institution and enforcement of the work ethic, and the Gothic fantastic could be seen to accompany these conceptions of work. Monleón associates the late development of fantastic literature in Spain with Spanish "idleness," and once again the Gothic fantastic does not appear until bourgeois formulations of work and production are secured (152, 109). Monleón also associates the fantastic with reactionary romanticism in both Germany and Spain (110). In Spain's medieval romances, the supernatural was not seen as unnatural or "a source of tension" (111); it did not function in the same way as in Gothic literature and did not start to match up with the rest of Europe until after 1860 (112). He therefore makes a "formal or generic as well as historical separation" between the supernatural, or broader fantastic tradition in literature present in myth, folktale, and fairy tale, and the Gothic fantastic, which is embedded in bourgeois society (Monleón 109). He is creating a division from the historically and culturally deep roots of the fantastic, one that is necessary to make his argument internally consistent, but it is a distinction I will not draw.

In the 19th century, with the backdrop of the 1848 revolution, Monleón states that Gothic literature marked unreason's transition away from the periphery, to suggest "a real alternative present within the very premises of society" (51-2). These new settings occurred within the boundaries of civilized bourgeois society. The French and Industrial

---

[58] This same idea can be seen in *Frankenstein*, with the creature as the grave-digger made by his bourgeois creator.

Revolutions created a blurring of social classes and spaces that required differentiating the middle classes, who are reasonable, from the "mob" (Monleón 56). This had the moral dimension of differentiating the compliant from the non-compliant (57). The point was no longer solely expulsion or confinement but the incorporation and reuse of workers, excluding only non-conformists (58). In this context, literary settings moved away from the castles and woods of the medieval to "the 'unknown country' of the bas-fonds" (63), the underground.[59]

The threat of unreason was interiorized and tied to the proletariat (Monleón 64). Poverty, criminality, and immorality became fused (69), with anything "from sickness to revolutions" being tainted as unreason (67). The dangers of the underworld were no longer marginal, and the monstrousness of the lower classes became visible as a category that constituted a "concave reflection," a reversal (Monleón 79). The use of distortion as a fantastic technique that clouded the boundaries between the real and unreal also made the monstrous other recognizable "in 'the self'" (Monleón 80). The internalization of fear and conflict in the bourgeois subject made unreason and monstrosity comprehensible as an extension of reason: as with *Frankenstein*'s creature, the monster could be seen within (Monleón 71).

In relation to fantasy as genre and its gothic orientation or style, Monleón's formulation is important in its articulation of the periphery and confinement as descriptors and responses to gothic fears. Fantasy is about the remnants of what has been lost socially and materially, but it is also about power relations: it is about who gets to claim (or reclaim) power, which can occur in ways that seem impossible. Reactionary fantasy is not only a reconfirmation of bourgeois order or a desire to return to tradition, but can draw on the desire of some low-status individuals to regain the power lost in the transition to capitalism *mixed with* their desire to retain the power over others they gained through it in new relations of class, gender, race, and other divisions.

The transformation of the non-capitalist to the capitalist involves the double aspect of the exteriorization of social relations and the interiorization of power relations.

---

[59] Miéville's works feature these urban and underground settings, as will be discussed in chapter 5.

This exteriorization of the social includes: the transformation of the natural to the supernatural, and its subsequent exorcism; the dispossession of the commoner to waged (or unwaged and coerced) labour, and the exportation of social relations to total administration; and the physical and moral confinement and marginalization of the proletariat and non-conforming populations. The interiorization of power includes: moving from the common or public sphere to the private sphere; the transformation of the commoner to the individual, and then to the abstract subject; and the internalization of the moral dimension of work and discipline, with corresponding changes to the self. Combined, these indicate a transition from the real (the concrete, embodied) to the not-real (abstracted, alienated). Attacks on the body and on the connection to land and nature are accompanied by a shift in the perception of nature, where the natural becomes supernatural becomes unnatural, and becomes unreason. Disembodiment and disenchantment are necessary co-factors of the same process, both ensuring that threats do not materialize in the real, and as much life energy and potential as possible is alienated and made invisible. Since fantasy itself is ultimately immaterial, what does it take to re-enchant the material, and what is the role of fantasy in this process? How can fantasy become embodied, and is this a desirable outcome?

2.6. The Alternate Life of the Grotesque and Carnivalesque

One route to understanding how fantasy might be embodied is through consideration of the grotesque and carnivalesque. The grotesque and the fantastic are aesthetically and stylistically related, with the grotesque having become a genre itself in the 18th century, incorporating interrelationships and porous boundaries that allow for "the dissolution of reality and the participation in a different kind of existence" (Kayser 21-2). Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque emphasizes the revolutionary and utopian aspects of folk culture, featuring "the popular, chthonian impulse to carnival" (xxi). McNally perceives the grotesque and carnivalesque, as articulated by Bakhtin, to be a response to "the anti-sensuous, anti-corporeal" aspects of capitalism (254). Carnival stood in direct opposition to "the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture" (Bakhtin 4) and had both a comic and a ritual aspect (5), with the mimetic inversion of official ritual.

Carnival created a "two-world condition" where medieval people "built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year" (Bakhtin 6). This idea of being able to live simultaneously in two worlds is important to ideas of radical fantasy, especially in the context of one world created to contrast and provide an alternative to the imposed order. Carnival's events and festivals were spectacles, existing in "the borderline between art and life" (Bakhtin 7). Carnival time was also liminal, not subject to official time but engendering "a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part" (7). Carnival, as such, was a tangible and embodied alternate world, that of "the people's second life" or "festive life" (8).[60]

Festive time was related to recurring natural cycles or historical events that were recalled, with elements of "death and revival" and "change and renewal" (Bakhtin 8). The second life was inhabited only during carnival or festival, where people participated in the abandon of their usual constraints, while official rituals served the opposite function of bolstering rule by using "the past to consecrate the present" (9). Carnival offered a tangible freedom from the imposed feudal order and "marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (10). The new configuration of social relations was not merely imagined but was experienced, manifesting the embodied utopic (10).[61]

The carnivalesque includes the conception of an upside-down world. The upside-down world contains "the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (*à l'envers*), of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear" (Bakhtin 11, 95). The upside-down world can also be seen as the underworld, as a chthonic inversion, and entering and leaving it involves a journey or catabasis.[62] Embodiment's utopian aspects of abundance and renewal were partnered with a "degradation" consisting of "the

---

[60] McNally comments on the limits of Bakhtinian analysis, especially regarding gender and race, as well as the potential for the co-option and reification of the carnivalesque through the culture industries (255).

[61] Contemporary attempts to recreate similar alternate festive worlds have been noteworthy in both their popularity and in their easy co-option, such as the Burning Man festival. Direct similarities to the challenges faced by radical fantasy can be drawn.

[62] With thanks to Ken Seigneurie for articulating the concept of catabasis.

lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" to the lower bodily sphere as a kind of grounding, to "bring down to earth" (Bakhtin 20). The earth "devours" or "swallows," comprising a descent to the underworld that then gives birth or rebirth (20). Grotesque realism is, in this way, "opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world" (19).

In explorations of what he calls the "underland," Robert Macfarlane describes underworlds as containing a cultural midden of fears, desires, and remembrances. He sees that the underland has consistently served "to shelter what is precious, to yield what is valuable, and to dispose of what is harmful … Into the underland we have long placed that which we fear and wish to lose, and that which we love and wish to save" (Macfarlane 8). Macfarlane presents the idea that the dark of the underland has its own "medium of vision," with descent as "a movement towards revelation rather than deprivation" through discovery or excavation (17). This resonates with Bakhtin's description of the underworld as providing the substance for renewal.

The idea of cataphany helps to identify what I am attempting to describe as a similar process or journey of catabasis in fantasy, which lies underneath and supports the categorizations I have used. In the novel *After Alice*, a retelling of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Gregory Maguire coins the term cataphany: "'from the Greek *cata*, meaning down, and *phantazein*, to make visible. Also the root of *fantasy*, don't you know. Cataphany: an insight, a revelation of underness'" (272-3). Fantasy involves the endeavour to make visible that which is underneath, the unconscious or underconscious, and that which is not intended to be seen. Rupture or disruption indicates severing or separation, but also descent, with its fearful, monstrous aspects. There is a transitional, liminal period, hopefully a period of discovery, in the underground or upside-down world, which leads to an attempt at reconnection, revival, renewal. This reconnection may not be possible without catabasis, or cataphany: the world is turned upside down to be recreated. The upside-down world therefore brings more than unfamiliarity or

uncanniness, more than estrangement.[63] It brings the potential for cyclical renewal, reoccurrence with change.[64]

As the physical existence of the second life was encroached upon in the transition from the feudal, it became displaced to the mental sphere of the individual and the aesthetic sphere of art. Using *Don Quixote* as example, Bakhtin notes the dual aspect or "double existence" (22) that started to take place with the individualization of the bourgeois subject and the privatization of the second life, where he claims its "positive regenerating force" was lost (23), with a "gradual narrowing" to become "small and trivial" (33) in the 17th and 18th centuries. The festive life became interiorized, turned into holiday and ensconced within the private household (33).

Bakhtin's analysis is consistent with the historical timeline of enclosures and the development of capitalism as already outlined; the loss of the experience of the second life can be seen as intimately connected to the loss of the commons, and communality, as the physical location of carnival. The all-encompassing nature of carnival was lost, both in its physical instantiations and its temporal quality. The second or alternate world was separated, excised, made homeless. It became disembodied, but survived in imagination and art; however, it is also remembered, even if unconsciously, as a real world. Part of us looks to resubstantiate this second world. Since fantasy exists as a liminal place, it may provide a refuge for the second life. Bakhtin makes a claim for literature as refuge: that the "carnival spirit and grotesque imagery continued to live and was transmitted as a now purely literary tradition," where carnival "lost its living tie with folk culture" and became "a literary genre" (34). It was severed, but also preserved in literature and art.[65] In

---

[63] Jerry Zaslove comments that Freud's uncanny, in its German etymology, is a knowing (*kennen* or *ken*), and a doubling ("Replies"). Freud separates the experiences of the uncanny in life from those in imaginative literature, and describes the imaginative context as "richer" because it contains experience but also the element of something missing, "something that is wanted in real life" (155).

[64] The inside-out or upside-down world does seem to work best in literature when there is a clear hierarchy against which to contrast, as in medieval feudalism. Gregory Maguire comments on this in the additional essay included in his novel *After Alice*: how Carroll's upside-down world in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* made sense against strict Victorian conventions and mores, but this is complicated now by the continual co-option of the culture industry.

[65] Bakhtin points to remnants of carnival in the *commedia dell'arte* and the comic novel (34). Jonathan Swift is a particularly useful example, as a text like *Gulliver's Travels* makes a direct link between the satiric and the fantastic.

literature, the "carnival spirit" retained the functions of release from conventional norms and allowing an alternate "outlook" or worldview (Bakhtin 34).

The interiorization of the second world is a central aesthetic feature of the Romantic grotesque. Wolfgang Kayser notes that the Romantic grotesque combines fantastic elements and heterogeneity with alienation and confusion (51). In the 16th century, the grotesque contained the idea of the "fusion" of the human and nonhuman (24), consistent with my previous articulation of the fantastic as continuous with the natural. But by the 18th century, the grotesque had become an aspect of dream and imagination, associated with the "'supernatural'" and the "'absurd'" (Kayser 31) with responses of surprise, horror, and fear—as described in Monleón's characterization of the Gothic fantastic—disclosing the consciousness of estrangement combined with the idea of the dematerialization of the self. The notion of an alternate world is shown in certain romantic sensibilities, in figures like Hoffmann, who supported the "dreamlike" nature of "the unruly fantasy which creates its own world" and "furnishes the congenial soul with a glimpse of the real one behind it" (Kayser 40). Once again, in fantasy we see an interaction between the real and not-real, with the not-real providing insight into the nature of the given reality.

Bakhtin argues against the Romantic association of the grotesque with fear, saying this is a diluted version of what existed in carnival, especially in that the everyday became estranged (39). These are elements that Bakhtin insists were not present in the medieval grotesque, which in contrast served to challenge and ridicule fear. On this basis, neither the Romantic grotesque nor the Gothic fantastic could be perceived as continuations of the medieval grotesque and carnivalesque. The Romantic interpretation, however, involves the important recognition that the process of alienation is the source of that dilution. The Romantic shift is therefore a critical indicator of what has been lost.

Bakhtin does recognize certain insights gained through the Romantic perspective, particularly in relation to subjectivity: that "if a reconciliation with the world occurs, it takes place in a subjective, lyric, or even mystic sphere" (39). Romanticism's "discovery" was of internal "depth" and "complexity"; the "*interior infinite* of the individual" (44).

Bakhtin also cites Hoffmann as epitomizing the Romantic grotesque, which contains remnants of older forms or recovers them (47), with consistency in forms such as fairy tale. However, he observes that in fairy tale, the world is "strange and unusual" but not alienated, whereas the grotesque incorporates daily life and reality that turns "hostile" (48).[66] The Romantic grotesque is reflecting changes in the world, not simply reiterating what was already present in these stories. It can also include the attempt to maintain stability in bourgeois structures, as Monleón points out, especially in the structures of the self.

Carnival, and its presence in the grotesque, does indicate previous material embodiment, a form of being in the world that has been estranged; but this does persist in certain Romantic and romanticist works, even if diluted or transformed. Bakhtin acknowledges that the Romantic grotesque "discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life" (48). But he emphasizes that the "pre-Romantic" utopian aspects of the grotesque were embodied rather than abstract or part of the "inner experience" (48). There is tremendous value in the inner experience, the inner journey, that was afforded by Romantic explorations and has given much to literature. This need not be rejected but may give direction for ways to incorporate the ideas of return and renewal necessary to Bakhtin's second life, not as a restitution, but a regeneration. Inwardness in fantasy can be an exploration of undifferentiated emotional content that is in the narratives and in the readers themselves, though there is also fantasy that is flat or surface, that doesn't explore this content but only its form.

It seems to me that what I am attempting to track is the experience of fantasy, what it feels like. It is for this reason that I have looked to Bakhtin, as the feeling of carnival, which persists in holiday and other diminished forms, feels the same. We can begin to understand the experience of fantasy as the continuation of the past and its anticipations through ideas of refuge and reconnection, as expressed in fantasy's mythic orientation.

---

[66] Freud makes a similar distinction between fairy tale and the uncanny (153-6).

Chapter 3.

Reconnection (The Mythic)

We want reconnection, re-enchantment. We look to the past, to our mythic histories. We search for a path and look to well-worn stories that have endured. We feel a glimmering of something that could be but does not yet exist outside of the imagination. We look to our own childhoods for a wondrousness that may not yet have been annihilated. There is a rootedness here that carries a danger of degeneration into refamilarization, restoration, the hard crystallization of the known and its usefulness to domination. This appears in the mythic and mythopoetic, most often seen in high fantasy.

As we have seen, fantasy literature is commonly critiqued as idealized, reactionary, and as involving an outright rejection of modernity. Idealization and a rejection of modernity could even be perceived as features of high fantasy, though a blanket assessment of reaction is less clear. These works can be conservative, restitutive, escapist, and consolatory, which from a Marxist perspective seems to rule them out as a source of radical content. A closer examination, however, shows that the argument here is complex and undetermined. The transition from feudalism to capitalism involved a corresponding internalization of instrumental rationalization that necessitated both a feminization and an infantilization of storytelling traditions and an impoverishment of experience. We can thus perceive fantasy as incorporating a contradictory but significant resistance to processes of instrumentalization. These tendencies can be brought to light through an examination of utopian aesthetics in the Frankfurt School.

In this chapter, the dynamics of domination and mastery, prefigured in myth and present in the development of the bourgeois subject, are contrasted with magical mimesis and the expression and refuge of the mythic in art as articulated in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Benjamin's "The Storyteller" is used to explain the embodied experience of storytelling as part of mythic oral traditions, and the ways in which the experience of story can still be perceived in fantasy. It is through Bloch and Marcuse's utopian aesthetics that one can begin to see clearly how fantasy's

contradictions can exist within the form and yet continue to provide space for more expansive potentialities: Marcuse's aesthetic dimension further explains the autonomous refuge of art, and Bloch's anticipatory illumination indicates the sense of something missing, of unfulfilled desires, as well as that of something new, the "not-yet" existing in tendencies and waiting to be realized. Jack Zipes, who analyzes the historical development of the fairy tale from the perspective of Critical Theory, emphasizes Bloch's utopian function. Zipes also draws unlikely connections between Bloch and J.R.R. Tolkien. A reanalysis of Tolkien's position on fantasy, as presented in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," using both Bloch's utopian function and Marcuse's aesthetic dimension, serves to elucidate radical threads and possibilities in the high fantasy tradition. This culminates in an examination of wonder as a mode of knowledge useful in understanding fantasy, and an exploration of Ursula K. Le Guin's views on fantasy as a process of discovery and imagination as a necessary human faculty.

3.1. Myth and Magical Mimesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

So far, I have been following processes of severance and alienation. Now, in turning to the mythic, I would like first to consider the problem of the logic of domination in myth and magic as it might then be recognized in fantasy. In the preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer state: "What is at stake is not conservation of the past but the fulfillment of past hopes" but observe that "the past is being continued as the destruction of the past" (xvii). The restitution of the past is not available to us, there is no point in time we can go back to, and the continuation of the past is that of the history of catastrophe.[67] The project of the Enlightenment, with its goal of liberation and demystification, has ensured this ongoing catastrophe:

> Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1)

---

[67] With thanks to Samir Gandesha for this clarification ("Personal").

Enlightenment as disenchantment encompasses a compulsion toward mastery: of the self, of technology, of nature; and we must recoil at the implied subjugation of others in this compulsion, which has been borne out in history. Though enlightenment appears as a break with the past, Adorno and Horkheimer show these ideas of mastery to be extensions of certain mythic constructions, and therefore see myth as prefiguring or setting up the conditions for the logic of domination present in Enlightenment thought.[68] Technology in this context reflects instrumental knowledge: knowledge as a tool of domination, of nature and people. Knowledge is equated with power and is posited as lacking limits. The subject's "awakening" rests on power as the primary axis defining all relations and gives humanity a sense of godlike-ness; power and mastery are achieved only through estrangement and work (Adorno and Horkheimer 5-13).

Disenchantment therefore targets the mythic but is also consistent with elements of it. Enlightenment finds myth embedded in philosophy and attempts to expel it. Demythologization entails a conceptual reorganization toward "a schema for making the world calculable" (Adorno and Horkheimer 4). This schema applies to bourgeois society through reductionism and abstraction: through positivism, made possible by "the projection of subjective properties onto nature" as opposed to a recognition of continuity, identification, and relationship with nature, so that the mythic becomes located in the subject (Adorno and Horkheimer 4). The intent is to eradicate the "gods and qualities" of myth (5), where qualities are qualia, irreducible particulars. The unity of nature becomes "stripped of qualities" and submitted to classification (Adorno and Horkheimer 6).

This process is seen as produced by myth and mythic attempts to provide an accounting of the world through naming and narrative. The importance of naming is present in both myth and enlightenment; in the latter, it becomes a matter of "resemblance" rather than the signification and element of connection or "kinship" present in the former (Adorno and Horkheimer 7). In magic and myth, "fate had been one with the spoken word" (47), reinforcing the direct connection between the thing and its

---

[68] This will be examined in more detail later in this section in relation to Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of Homer's *The Odyssey*.

name and the idea that to name a thing is to exert influence over it.[69] The *nomen*, naming, as a principle of enlightenment (Adorno and Horkheimer 17) gives the impression of neutrality. Positivism disallows the desire or inclination to "speculate about intelligible worlds" (19). In myth, magic, and scientific abstraction, to name is to control, with both taking part in "existence as a schema," which then results in estrangement and reification (21).

The control offered by naming is reinforced with the logic of sacrifice, which is perceived to be central to myth, and then to enlightenment. Sacrifice includes the substitution of one thing for another, moving toward abstraction rather than the concreteness of the thing and its qualities. All things and living beings become exemplars, which are infinitely expandable and replaceable (Adorno and Horkheimer 66). But abstraction always has an embodied cost. Sacrifice is a "representative restoration" of the past: it enables the configuration of the self in a way that creates estrangement, and is therefore "a behavior pattern drilled into the subjugated," a recreation with a legacy of violence (Adorno and Horkheimer 41). While the self experiences animosity toward the idea of sacrifice, self-sacrifice is demanded in the form of alienation for the purposes of domination: you sacrifice yourself to save yourself in an attempt at both "self-preservation" (43) and "self-mastery" (44). This process of sacrifice and renunciation is a critical component of the development of the individuated, bourgeois subject.

In addition to the ritual of sacrifice, rituals of magic are discussed in their relationship to power. Magic is described as a means of influencing outcomes, but the logic remains the same: exerting power or control. However, even though magic is seen as "bloody untruth," it does not contain the idea of domination as "a pure truth underlying the world which it enslaves," and does not involve the emptying of qualities or particulars, but rather "implies specific representation" (Adorno and Horkheimer 6). Its undifferentiation is part of what is experienced both *in* and *through* fantasy. It has goals in mind but resolves to achieve these through *magical mimesis* rather than the detachment

---

[69] Le Guin's system of magic in her Earthsea series is based on the power of naming and knowing true names.

of abstraction as a liquidation replacing fate (Adorno and Horkheimer 7-9).[70] Enlightenment banishes visions of an idyllic past, of "mimetic magic" and the chthonic: it objects to undifferentiation, to many particulars as part of an undifferentiated whole, which is not supernatural but natural and encompasses the unknown and the fear of the unknown upon which enlightenment's demythologization is based (Adorno and Horkheimer 10-11). Enlightenment demands the loss of the particular to the specimen or exemplar.

There is a process being described by Adorno and Horkheimer where the sacred and magical mythic, once transformed by processes of rationalization, become officialized, located in mediators or managers, and institutionalized. This should not be seen as part of a course of linear civilizational development,[71] but as a process of administration that concentrates power and normalizes submission and obedience. The interests of those in power become universalized and come to be seen as the "true reality" rather than as justifications for particular social orders (Adorno and Horkheimer 16). Mimesis, myth, and metaphysics become viewed as "stages of world history which had been left behind" and the thought of "reverting" to any of them is a source of terror, which if indulged necessitates punishment (24).

In periods when myth has been repressed, fear of nature resurfaces, resulting in a recommitment to attempts to control nature, tied to the drive toward self-preservation. The choices seem to be either being at the mercy of nature or exerting control over nature by embracing domination, and both choices are mythologized. The pull of the past is met with strict divisions between past, present, and future, where the past is not recoverable but is put to work for the present (Adorno and Horkheimer 24-5). The cyclical representation of time that occurs in nature, as acknowledged in the mythic, need not represent a categorizing mindset; renewal need not indicate a sense of permanence or

---

[70] There is an interrelationship between the subject and object in magical mimesis that becomes replaced by the schema of myth and enlightenment and its anthropomorphism, leading to "a form of subjectivity bereft of inwardness." Quote and clarification from Samir Gandesha in his comments on this thesis, with thanks.

[71] The ideas of magic and myth used by Adorno and Horkheimer do seem to adopt a frame of linear cultural or civilizational stages. Their description of the primeval has a Rousseauian quality, the idea of a state of nature that precedes civilization, as if this is something that was ever possible, a state of humanity divorced from social life.

control. Impermanence and change are inherent to natural cycles, and attempts at magical (or other) interventions can be seen in various contexts as: a means of gaining a sense of mastery or control; supplication (the logic of sacrifice); or can indicate that one perceives oneself to be in relationship with natural forces, and it is the latter that provides the renewal indicated in Bakhtin's second life and in fantasy's reconnection and refuge.

It is in the realm of art that the past finds both refuge and expression. This is extended in fantasy as a fundamental aspect of the genre. Art and magic both comprise "a special, self-contained sphere removed from the context of profane existence" (Adorno and Horkheimer 13-4), an autonomous sanctuary with a rejection of the mundane and its laws. Art or "aesthetic illusion" is "the appearance of the whole in the particular" (14), the related inversion of the undifferentiated whole as composed of multiple particulars: the whole in the individual, and the individual in the whole. Art as refuge includes an "urge to rescue the past as something living, instead of using it as the material of progress" (Adorno and Horkheimer 25). Under the grindstone of work and subservience, the fulfilment of the desires shared in art is characterized as illusion and the persistence of these desires requires increasing suppression where "[f]antasy withers" (28) and "pleasure has learned to hate itself" (24). In the resulting disconnection from the "sensuous world" and "sensuous experience," the mastery or subjugation of the senses and thought "implies an impoverishment of thought no less than of experience" and "leaves both damaged" (28). Our abilities to conceptualize and to experience have been blunted.

But enlightenment itself opens up possibilities to oppose domination which it betrays. The distance created through processes of abstraction and classification can provide the means to assess injustice (Adorno and Horkheimer 32). The facts provided are "part of praxis" as a chronicle of the experience of the horrors of domination, since "experience is always real action and suffering" (64). We are given methods to articulate the manner of our domination, based in lived experience. But we continue to make judgments according to conceptual frameworks biased toward domination, and to perceive these as objective truth, which becomes ensconced in culture as ideology.

Fantasy as genre constitutes an attempt to work out the conflict between the individual and culture presented in this dialectic of enlightenment, particularly of self-preservation against culture, in which the mythic is both complicit and provides a challenge. Adorno and Horkheimer use Homer's *The Odyssey* to show the "intertwinement of myth, power, and labor" (25). Using the example of the Sirens, they illustrate how myth offers the allure of the past with the "promise of a happy homecoming," of the "irrecoverable," as "the deception by which the past entraps a humanity filled with longing" (Adorno and Horkheimer 26). The irrecoverable past persists as a yearning that must be disciplined and sublimated, or can be indulged only if deprived of power and influence. If this desire lacks embodiment, if sensuous experience is exiled from daily life, there is the resulting diminishment described above. Fantasy, and art in general, could therefore be characterized as a Siren song, registering the call of the irrecoverable, or at least its absence.

In *The Odyssey*, the hero's adventure outlines a process of estrangement from, submission to, and overcoming of nature, which the self survives through cunning (*metis*). Odysseus, as hero, appears as "the prototype of the bourgeois individual" (Adorno and Horkheimer 35), showing the "subject's flight from mythical powers" (37). Cunning is interpreted as "the adaptation of bourgeois reason to any unreason which confronts it as a stronger power" (48). So cunning does not protect the hero from the need for sacrifice and self-mastery, rather it demands the loss of dream and magic. Magic is "dissolution" of the self (Adorno and Horkheimer 54), but the self-preservation of reason requires repudiation and self-sacrifice.

There is also the feeling of extreme loss in the loss of enlightenment. To want otherwise is to want "oblivion" (Adorno and Horkheimer 54). The example of the Lotus-Eaters outlines the desire for intoxication and oblivion. The annihilation of awareness in the attempt to avoid or manage the suffering of existence is the means through which "subordinate classes have been made capable of enduring the unendurable in ossified social orders," but indulgence to the point of oblivion keeps people from "the realization of utopia through historical work" (Adorno and Horkheimer 49). In Odysseus' visit to the underworld, the theme of the catabasis shows how "the motif of forcing the gates of hell,

67

of abolishing death, is the innermost call of all antimythological thought" (Adorno and Horkheimer 60). The underworld journey can be part of exploring the chthonic and the unconscious, but the aspect pointed out here is that it is implicated in the logic of domination, as overcoming death is the pinnacle of the mastery of nature, and exposing oneself to these depths is only intended as a means of subduing or conquering them.

Adorno and Horkheimer do connect myth to fantastic literature indirectly through the adventure story, noting that the transferring of the mythic into the novel "does not falsify myth so much as drag it into the sphere of time, exposing the abyss which separates it from homeland and reconciliation" (61). Here fantasy could substitute for the adventure story, except that the reconciliation of the abyss is at least part of fantasy's intention or purpose, including its use of the mythic. Attebery remarks that fantasy lacks the "cultural authority" of myth (*Stories* 21); it is a game, but is also negotiated, and uses the mythic to contest the claims of history and science (22). Fantasy "claims no authority nor exerts hegemony" due to its "nonfactuality" (Attebery *Stories* 4), its impossibility. In drawing on the mythic, it is possible for fantasy to reiterate the language of domination, but it can provide resistance to the authority and hegemony of culture as ideology through imaginative configurations safeguarded within the sphere of art.

3.2. The Storyteller and the Experience of Story

The fantastic as mode is tied to storytelling traditions both written and oral, and these can make up part of our critical understanding and experience of fantasy. In his essay "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin describes an increasing inability to tell stories in modernity as an inability "to exchange experiences" (83). He states that this waning of storytelling traditions began with the development of the novel (87), distinguished by its lack of rootedness in the oral tradition as well as its elements of isolation, interiorization, and self-reflection. The novelist must therefore "carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life" (87). I propose, however, that in fantasy storytelling is not only expressed but experienced in the novel. Oral storytelling has a performative aspect that is not easily translatable to the novel form. There is an element of aura, of shared experience in performance, that is lost. This is, as Benjamin says, most extreme in

the novel, and is also one of the reasons why it is important to retain, since it is a different kind of experience, a sharing that is not dependent on the restrictions of time and place.

The aura of story relates to the state of consciousness involved in performance: the creation of an altered state of consciousness in which story is absorbed and embedded in a subconscious manner, which can be reinforced through rhythm and patterns of repetition (Benjamin "Storyteller" 91), creating entrainment. There is an intimate connection between story and artisanal work or craft, in which story (and song) could likewise be embedded in the rhythms of work (Benjamin "Storyteller" 91). This adds another layer to the idea of the second life: that it was not only present in carnival time, but existed in the everyday as well, corresponding to both work and seasonal rhythms and flow. Stories that are shared "in the milieu of work" make up "an artisan form of communication" (Benjamin "Storyteller" 91) that "sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again" (91-2). The connection to craft is a connection to the past that has been lost or degraded. The storyteller and the story can be described as being in relationship, and Benjamin characterizes it as "a craftsman's relationship" meant "to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way" ("Storyteller" 108). Benjamin uses the proverb as example, specifically as being "a ruin which stands on the site of an old story" (108). Though I would object to the need to make story utilitarian, Benjamin is tracing a line to the past where story builds upon its own ruins and remnants.

Stories therefore build on memory. Memory in epic, or more broadly, in the mythic, becomes "*remembrance*" in the novel (Benjamin "Storyteller" 98). Benjamin sees storytellers as able to transmit experience through story by engaging in yet another kind of catabasis: storytellers can "move up and down the rungs of their experience as on a ladder. A ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds is the image for a collective experience to which even the deepest shock of every individual experience, death, constitutes no impediment or barrier" ("Storyteller" 102). But even in the novel, retellings are possible, and this extends beyond reminiscence: experience can be recalled, meant also in the sense of calling toward. Fantasy often has a feeling of wanting to continue, whether that be in echoing the old or

exploring the new. Its flight from the real, to the novel in form and the impossible in content, is steadied by its rootedness in the past and its rhythms.[72]

Benjamin does connect storytelling to myth and fairy tale, making room for a route to fantasy. He emphasizes the function of the fairy tale in providing "good counsel" (Benjamin "Storyteller" 102). But like Adorno and Horkheimer, he sees the need for fairy tale's counsel as "the need created by the myth" (102). Benjamin is therefore positioning the fairy tale not only in opposition to myth but as a form of resistance to it. This tension between myth and fairy tale is not present in all instances, and mythic and folk traditions are not necessarily or even typically discontinuous, but there is space for the idea of a radical mythic that is perhaps best or most easily perceived in fairy tale as a transitional form. Benjamin references Bloch and the idea of a "hybrid" between myth and fairy tale that incorporates a magic escape from the limitations of myth ("Storyteller" 103). This hybrid mythic can be recognized in fantasy. Attebery describes fantasy as a "second mythic method" (*Stories* 49) that can "substitute" for oral storytelling but has to figure out "how the mythic interacts with the everyday" (50). This new mythic method has the following functions: organizing and coping with modernity; exorcizing the unwanted, including aspects of the self; redemption; and play (52-4). Like Macfarlane's underland, it reflects what we fear and want to bury, and what we love and want to save.

Story, through the novel, has become abstract and intangible. But story is also a place: it is embodied in experience and has an architecture that affects how we conceptualize and construct our worlds. Story remains physically and psychically embedded in our lives: we are nurtured and structured through story, which makes it already embodied within us. We are made through story and can remake the world through story.

---

[72] Jerry Zaslove makes a connection to story as *Geschichte*, which means both story and history. He notes that though Benjamin does not mention this explicitly in "The Storyteller," the interrelationships between memory and history are central to his thinking ("Replies").

3.3.   The Utopian Aesthetics of Marcuse and Bloch

The continued presence of story in the novel, as well as its radical potential, is made possible through the autonomy provided by art: through the aesthetic dimension. In *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Herbert Marcuse states that art can be revolutionary if it produces an "aesthetic transformation" that shows us both our "prevailing unfreedom" as well as the "rebelling forces" that resist unfreedom; these artistic transformations counteract mystification and create new horizons in which liberation is possible (xi). He defines the aesthetic dimension's ability to liberate as:

> … grounded precisely in the dimensions where art *transcends* its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence. Thereby art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality. This experience culminates in extreme situations (of love and death, guilt and failure, but also joy, happiness, and fulfillment) which explode the given reality in the name of a truth normally denied or even unheard. The inner logic of the work of art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions. (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 6-7)

The transcendent quality of art enables it to create a world, one capable of making visible those truths which are constrained in our current reality. In effect, art renders truth more true by condensing it to that which resonates with human experience, with our needs and desires beyond those confined to instrumental rationalization and reification. Art shows us how the world could be if emancipated from capitalism's total administration, and in challenging the supremacy of the given reality, art gives us power to define reality (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 9). Thus, art's *Reality Principle* is that of estrangement (10).

However, Marcuse argues that art also maintains "strong affirmative tendencies toward reconciliation" due to "the redeeming character of *catharsis*" (*Aesthetic* 10). Marcuse states that art functions as an expression of and a consolation for a reality of suffering. Art cannot represent reality without transforming it, engendering catharsis (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 55), which involves a recognition and dispersal of energies: a feeling of action, a release that is both pleasurable and liquidating, often serving to affirm rather

than challenge the status quo. Art's affirmative qualities are therefore contradictory: affirmative art can still be transcendent, and negation can be affirmative through catharsis (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 58-9). Thus, even in the resolution made accessible through catharsis, there remains that which is "irreconcilable" (59), the "will to live" that drives resistance and demands for liberation (63).

These demands are situated in the artistic creation of alternatives, of something other, which finds its way to us through memory (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 56). In authentic works of art, even those considered affirmative "still preserve the memory of things past" (10). The other is "transhistorical" (56), and it is this aspect that makes it possible to consider utopian alternatives. The utopian impulse—in art and in culture—becomes obsolete to the degree that it is realized or concretized (28); but even the creation of an ideal utopian society would not negate the need for art, since we are still human, facing human problems. What art does change is consciousness (32-3).

Important to Marcuse's aesthetics is his understanding of the subject and subjectivity. Marcuse states that the approach in Marxist aesthetics has become static, with a focus on the material base to the exclusion of the individual's consciousness and subconscious: the subjective (*Aesthetic* 2-3). He insists that the individual is not just a "rational subject" but possesses "inwardness, emotions, and imagination" as a source of value (3), but Marxist aesthetics diminishes the subjective as a foundation for revolutionary potential. These passions, emotions, and desires are not peripheral but "decisive, they constitute reality" (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 5-6). Marcuse's claim recognizes that the ways in which we comprehend the world, in which we perceive, understand, and respond, are inherently rooted in the subjective. Presenting inwardness only with negative, bourgeois connotations as "self-indulgence" is not terribly different from "the scorn of the capitalists for an unprofitable dimension of life" (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 38). It is not a coincidence that this scorn is often cloaked in the language of subjectivity as a waste of time or as unproductive. But one need not remain forever in the withdrawal or escape of inwardness: it is when one re-emerges that transformation becomes possible in

the culture, where this process can instead be described as a "[l]iberating subjectivity" (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 5).[73]

Art's autonomy through the aesthetic dimension allows an alternate reality to co-exist with the given reality as a kind of second life. The creation of worlds within art's "own reality" ensures that these remain "valid even when … denied by the established reality" (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 27). Marcuse is particular and perhaps elitist in his insistence that liberation cannot be achieved through popular art because mass popularity compromises its liberatory potential (21). He takes the position that what is radical in art is not part of mainstream consciousness, and thus there is a "material and ideological discrepancy" that must first be addressed through the "radicalization of consciousness" (35). If this does not happen, there is a danger that art's aesthetic dimension could act as an ideological tool robbed of its autonomous and liminal world, a danger that also occurs in relation to demands that art be made functional and productive, which is why the concept of art for art's sake, of art having intrinsic value, is important. The goal is the creation of "a new 'system of needs'" that incorporates "a sensibility, imagination, and reason emancipated from the rule of exploitation" (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 36).

Artists, especially writers, who finds themselves inside or outside of class struggle are still "outsiders" precisely because they are artists; art's "transcendence" creates a necessary tension with praxis (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 37). There must be an unlearning process, a challenging and reframing that allows people to "reclaim their subjectivity, their inwardness" (37). Inwardness provides for a "private sphere" which operates as a defense against total administration and is an open environment for subversion and creation, the making of new worlds (38). And this is a quality that must be protected, particularly as administrative tendencies creep into every aspect of our lives and the notion of a private anything is eroded. Marcuse is making an argument for a secured inner life, for privacy of mind, an aim that has never been more relevant. The strength of

---

[73] Subjectivity's devaluation can also be linked to processes of feminization and infantilization, which will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Marcuse's position is that without this preserved autonomy, it may become impossible to even conceive of liberation or to know that it is necessary.

One of the limits of aesthetic autonomy is that art still needs to communicate (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 41). It is the tension between the familiar and the estranging that has the potential to transform consciousness, as "the encounter with the fictitious world restructures consciousness and gives sensual representation to a counter-societal experience. The aesthetic sublimation thus liberates and validates childhood and adult dreams of happiness and sorrow" (44). Art's sublimation is an indication of its preservation of Eros, which can be neutralized through repressive desublimation. The focus on the childhood dream that becomes belittled, twisted, and oppressed in adulthood is of importance to discussions of fantasy.

The estranging process occurs through what Marcuse calls critical mimesis. The point of critical mimesis is not simply to show things as they could or should be: it is to demystify, to break through our recalcitrance and show things as they really are, which is not necessarily clear to us. Critical mimesis results in an "intensification of perception" altering consciousness, creating conditions under which "the unspeakable is spoken, the otherwise invisible becomes visible, and the unbearable explodes" (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 45). We denounce the forces of domination and rejoice in our ability to resist, to rescue those things of real value (45). By reflecting society back to us in a critical way, art exposes that which confines us and that which could free us, mimetic images generated through both shadow and light.

For Marcuse, the image is appearance (*Schein*). The utopian element in art—its "promise of liberation," though art cannot realize it directly—is in the "appearance (*Schein*) of freedom" (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 46). Various versions of *Schein*, as appearance and as illusion, are of interest in their interpretations. Marcuse refers to art as "beautiful illusion (*schöner Schein*)" (*Aesthetic* 48). The world of art is illusion that contains truth, often more so than mundane reality, which is blanketed in mystification. Art constitutes "the *appearance* of truth" while our reality is "untrue, delusion" (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 54). This reversal of ideas of delusion is important: we are drawn to art's illusion as a means

of exposing the delusions of administered, rationalized, and instrumentalized life. We are thus also drawn to the ideal. The ideal in art can be seen as an aspect of its utopianism. Art does not change reality but creates a vision of that which can be realized, that exists in art's fictions as a kind of anticipation. This push toward realization constitutes the "hidden categorical imperative of art" (Marcuse *Aesthetic* 57-8).

I will turn now to Marcuse's contemporary Ernst Bloch, and utopian anticipation in art as central to his aesthetic approach. In *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, Bloch outlines the presence of what he calls *anticipatory illumination* in artistic works that constitute utopian tendencies in the aesthetic realm. There are two aspects to anticipations: a sense that something is missing, and an imperative to address unmet needs through the creation of something new, something close, something just on the horizon. Jack Zipes remarks that Bloch criticized the failure of the radical left for its disregard of those needs and desires and contended that this failure played a role in allowing fascism to take hold in Germany ("Introduction" xviii). There does exist, with the regressive and the reactionary, the "allure of the old-fashioned" with its "uncanny-homey element" (Bloch "Art and Society" 57). The uncanny, combined with homeliness and a sense of its loss or degradation, emphasizes the reality of alienation under capitalism. Where we can differentiate the reactionary is in its mining of the past for the purposes of domination and its restoration of oppressive systems and values.

Bloch thus relies on conceptions of "cultural heritage" preserving elements of culture that speak to these unmet needs. He observes that cultural forms can be revived even when their related political and social forms are not—as can be seen in periodic revivals of Greek or medieval art—through a process that Marx refers to as "'non-synchronous development,'" or as Bloch restates, a nonlinear process involving the "relative return of the cultural superstructure even when the base disappears" as "creatively postulated transformations" ("Art and Society" 34). Bloch notes that this tends to occur in older elements of that cultural superstructure: in mythology, where cultural remnants persist in mythic narratives. This recollection does not just occur as memory; rather, it is archaeological, but with the purpose of reutilization and transformation. Bloch's utopian function in cultural heritage works as follows:

> … [it] operates as the *successive continuation of the implications* in the cultural constellations of the past gathered around us as non-past … the genuine agent (*Täter*) of cultural heritage reaches into the past, and in this very same act the past itself anticipates him, involves and needs him. Thought cannot forge itself into reality when reality does not forge itself into thought. This Marxist principle of knowledge is also valid for the reality, which is present as cultural heritage. ("Art and Society" 46-7)

Bloch sees the past as consisting of tendencies and potentialities that exist non-synchronously, and the utopian function flows in currents of form and genre to engender their realization. We transcend the restrictions of time by paying attention to how certain tendencies have manifested in the past, and may manifest in the present or the future: they are all at once accessible through the past, in the present, anticipating the future. But there is also "the plunderer, the historical pirate"—with Nazi Germany presenting an obvious example—those who "take over history only for the purpose of falsifying it" (Bloch "Art and Society" 47).[74] It is these plunderers who are most rightly termed reactionary. The past should not be perceived as simply another resource to exploit.

Bloch equates his framing of cultural heritage to Marx's concept of the world's "'dream about a thing'" which "'does not concern a large hyphen between past and future but the completion of the idea of the past'" ("Art and Society" 51) or "'the *fulfillment* of the thoughts of the past'" ("Art and Utopia" 117). Unsuccessful attempts in the past at the realization of a better life are not dead and gone, futile and fruitless, but are instead indicative of an ongoing process in which we are engaged, and which has yet to come to completion. The work of art, under this view, is seen as something new, but is also connected to deep-rooted desires for fulfilment (Bloch "Art and Society" 38). The utopian function has been expressed through cultural heritage and cultural works, which retain the capacity to influence us and are "cultural anticipation[s]" reflecting what Bloch calls the "not-yet" or the "not-yet-conscious" ("Art and Utopia" 118). Art is utopian in the sense that it consists of "the attempted path and content of known hope" but also "despair … as something lost" (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 120). Once again, the sense of loss points toward unfulfilled needs and wishes. These utopian desires are formulated as a "will to art" and "will to magic" (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 86)—evoking Marcuse's "will

---

[74] This characterization may not be entirely fair to pirates.

to live." The will to art and magic are seen to have been intertwined in prehistory; Bloch thus makes a connection between the aesthetic and the magical ("Art and Utopia" 86), as do Adorno and Horkheimer with the idea of magical mimesis.

Art, as part of cultural heritage, becomes that which shows us what is missing, as well as what is wanted or anticipated, which must be made. Bloch imagines the future as a "house" to be built "that would be bright and friendly for all human beings" ("Art and Society" 58). Bloch compares this to the "instinct-future": many of the futures we create are "false" and derived from instinctual patterns, recycling the old as a "prearranged plot" or schema ("Art and Utopia" 104). This recycling is not the same as recovery, where the active agent engages with the anticipatory tendencies of cultural heritage. Bloch's utopian futures require a "productive presentiment" which "does not remain gloomy and tricky or even dense" but rather "is strong and healthy from the beginning" ("Art and Utopia" 104). We see repeated in Bloch's language notions of the not-yet as being bright, clear, and healthy.

The not-yet is a representation of hope through the imagination (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 105). It is not grounded in baseless imaginings but in "objective real potential" (104). This, again, is different from memory, which recombines that which already exists, and from fantasizing and wishful thinking. The imagination of the utopian function serves to "carry on the existing facts toward their future potentiality of their otherness, of their better condition in an anticipatory way" (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 105), and in this seems to have elements of extrapolation. Bloch makes sure to differentiate between the abstract utopia, as a form of "pure wishful thinking" which then leads to the dismissal of utopian thinking ("Art and Utopia" 105), and the concrete utopia, which involves the realization of these objective potentials through the "imaginative gaze of the utopian function" (106). Marcuse's claims about art's power as a "hidden imperative" toward realization does make it anticipatory. Bloch adds an extra element to art here, through the utopian function. Art is not a placeholder for future political praxis, it is an anticipation of the world to come, a process already underway. It is integral to how we understand ourselves and our possibilities and forms a real foundation for alternate ways of being.

Here Zipes points out in Bloch's aesthetics three uses of *Schein*: as illusion (*Schein*), as appearance (*Erscheinung*), and as anticipatory illumination (*Vor-Schein*), and it is the third of these that is constitutive of the utopian function ("Introduction" xxxiv). Zipes traces this distinction between illusion and appearance in Bloch to the influence of Kant and Hegel. The Kantian influence includes a designation of appearance as "constituted" and bounded by "our forms of space and time" and illusion as going "beyond" these boundaries of experience; illusion can involve self-deception or be transcendent, and in the latter form can serve to "regulate experience" (xxxiv). Zipes describes Hegel's phenomenological approach as comprised of a dialectic of illusion and appearance (xxxiv). These Kantian and Hegelian ideas contributed to Bloch's formulation of *Vor-Schein*, which "must be distinguished from both appearance and illusion as a real artistic configuration that sheds light ideally on what we might anticipate to be the goal of all humankind. It has an element of enlightenment in it" (xxxv). Art has the quality of *Vor-Schein*, making the artist a kind of "midwife who enables latent and potential materials to assume their own unique forms" (xx).

Bloch does not make a stark or dualistic distinction between the effects of art on consciousness and the effects in the world. Marcuse is consistent with Bloch in the perception of art's truth; the difference in Bloch's view is the degree to which he perceives art's anticipatory illumination as not just activating, but active: anticipatory illumination is a process that is already happening, that has been and continues to be present in a non-synchronous manner and is part of praxis—though it must still be realized in the form of the concrete utopia. Marcuse touches on this idea in his description of art as "transhistorical" and of art's "hidden categorical imperative," but in his figuration one gets a sense of a static rather than fluid and interactive relationship. This may be due to Marcuse's insistence on art's absolute autonomy: if one must preserve art in a separate sphere, then one sees it as able to be separated. Bloch posits constellations that depend on interrelationships, which makes the notion of segregating art nonsensical. Art as refuge can be theorized from either perspective, but it is Bloch's constellations that show greater potential for the embodiment of art in the mundane due to ongoing interaction.

Bloch uses the idea of a utopian surplus, which consists of the cultural heritage and anticipatory illumination, with the not-yet as also the not-thwarted ("Art and Society" 50). Idealism is seen as having preserved for the subject "the *freedom of a contradicting countermove against the bad existence*" (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 109). The subjective, anticipatory countermove is not mere "embellishment": it is not a reworking meant to reinforce the status quo (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 110). Bloch proposes an ideological surplus, where it is seen that we still have false consciousness, but also "more"; an abundance or opening which "allows for a so-called true consciousness to form itself in the mere false consciousness of ideology" ("Art and Society" 36). This insistence that we can connect to utopian consciousness even in the midst of false consciousness seems to offer an alternative to Marcuse's fear that everything will be subject to an almost inevitable co-option, though Marcuse does agree that there are "irreconcilable" elements in art that resist false consciousness.

Bloch asserts that the surplus content of bourgeois culture is appropriated to emancipatory ends, regardless of whether or not it is snared by illusion: anticipation "seizes the content in *interests* that have been progressive at one time, in *ideologies* that have not completely vanished with their respective societies, in *archetypes* that are still encapsulated, in *ideals* that are still abstract, in *allegories and symbols* that are still static" ("Art and Utopia" 111). Regarding interests, we "inherit" these in the same way that we inherit cultural works themselves, as a longing for the good life which was desired but not brought to fruition:

> … [t]here were many times that good things and even the best were wanted in the past, but for the most part they were not realized. And since the wants do not achieve their goal, they move on in the process of liberation to receive their due, in this case within the capitalist society. The utopian function saves these parts from deception. In this way, everything humanitarian feels increasingly related. (114)

Bloch maintains that there is always a kernel of the utopian that remains, undamaged, waiting to germinate once put in fertile ground again—Marcuse's irreconcilable.

Regarding ideology, Bloch remarks that sometimes things are not "clear" but are "unfinished" or "in a state of ferment" ("Art and Utopia" 114). While ideology uses false

consciousness as a means of justification, they are not equivalent (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 115). One can consider ideology from the vantage point of cultural heritage, where its "fruits" are "lifted from their initial social-historical ground since they are essentially not bound to it" (116). They do have history and context, but also have elements that transcend, that remain.

Archetypes have for Bloch "something not-worked-out," "unfinished" and "indelible" ("Art and Utopia" 124). This is what separates them from reactionary or "putrefied archetypes" (124): their potential to be reutilized and transformed, regardless of "all the spells within them" (126). Similarly, ideals may incorporate spells, mystification, and false consciousness, but are not confined by them (128-9). They have a "bright side" where even negatives, such as "substitution, disproportion, abstractness" are not definitive (130) since they can be rectified. Bloch characterizes ideals as "the response of the subject to what has become bad … the tendential response to the insufficient, in favor of what is appropriate for humanity" (136). This makes them utopian in nature though they are not always expressed and applied toward utopian goals. Ideals are important because the utopian requires more than an acknowledgment that something is missing and that something is desired; ideals proclaim that the "bad existence" is not enough, is not acceptable.

Allegories and symbols possess anticipations in which "meaning is not yet clear and not yet decided" (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 139). Their open-endedness leads to illusion (which can be *Schein* or *Vor-Schein*), of which artists make use (142). There have been both rationalistic and religious arguments against the arts throughout history based on the idea of illusion, but artists also want to search for truth (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 143-4). Stories, artistry are the means "through which the empty space between what has been concretely observed is filled with what has been invented and that gives the action a well-rounded shape" (145).[75] Those fulfilling human qualities which have been stripped away must be recovered, and it is through our imaginative faculties, through art, through

---

[75] The idea of well-roundedness becomes doubly defiant in a cultural climate that would also whittle down and discipline the body, and it is no accident that women experience greater bodily discipline in this manner.

story, that we are able to do so. Illusion, when applied aesthetically, incorporates anticipatory illumination, "which portrays things in a specifically aesthetic immanent way" wherein "everything that appears in the art images is sharpened, condensed, or made more decisive" (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 146). Again, Bloch and Marcuse are in agreement in this condensation or intensification that speaks to the not-yet, a world which is yet to be realized, a "future freedom" which has not been foreclosed (Bloch "Art and Utopia" 146). Art creates openings for the not-yet, hollows waiting to be filled, and then occupies those hollows, beckoning others to join in acts of resistance.

3.4.   A Critical View of Fairy Tale

From myth and storytelling, and the utopian approach in which they might be considered, we can move to a discussion of fairy tale. In his text *Breaking the Magic Spell*, Jack Zipes argues for the historicity of folk and fairy tales, and by extension, I argue for a history and politics of magic and wonder in relation to fantasy. Though both concepts have older philosophical histories, these specific adaptations can be traced clearly in folk and fairy tale and are inherited by fantasy.

By repositioning the fairy tale in a context of political or class struggle, Zipes makes an argument for their resilience (*Breaking* 27). Fairy tales persist, and remain relevant, because "their magic [can] be seen as part of humankind's own imaginative *and* rational drive to create new worlds that allow for total autonomous development of human qualities" (27). The fairy tale therefore incorporates a level of Marcuse's autonomy, which I reframe as refuge, due to its non-synchrony and utopian impulses, and makes use of a rationality that is informed by the human imaginative capacity. Zipes stresses that Bloch cites the fairy tale as "the common denominator of all utopian art," which discloses "the utopian or nonutopian role that genres play in fostering anticipatory illumination" ("Introduction" xxxvii). The fairy tale is thus not marginal but central to Bloch's utopian aesthetics.

Fantasy and fairy tale are subject to commodification and instrumentalization, making them often compensatory and obscuring their utopian content (Zipes *Breaking*

xiii). Referencing Adorno, Zipes contends that the culture industry ensures that the liberatory potential of folk and fairy tales rarely converts into praxis (*Breaking* 3). We no longer understand the importance of fairy tales as being derived "from their imaginative grasp and symbolic depiction of social realities" (6), as described by Benjamin in relation to storytelling and by Bloch in relation to art's interests, ideals, archetypes, symbols, and so on. Zipes maintains that this was not so in the past, when stories were treated as "communal property," expressing social experiences and problems (*Breaking* 6) and possessing a Benjaminian aura that pulsated with anticipatory illumination.

Zipes examines the transition from the older tradition of the folk tale, or *Volksmärchen*, to the specific one of the fairy tale, or *Kunstmärchen*, in the 16th-18th centuries with the appropriation of folk tales as entertainment for the privileged classes (*Breaking* 9-10, 29). The feminization of folk tales also occurred at this time (28); fairy tales became associated with women's supposed irrationality and lesser social status. As publishing and distribution developed, so did the fairy tale as a distinct genre (9-10), and folk tales were subjected to moral censorship: adapted and rewritten by bourgeois mediators such as the Grimms, moralizing elements were added, and the stories were only published and distributed in these versions (30). These alterations of folk and fairy tale narratives constituted the beginning of the process of fantasy's instrumentalization. The process of appropriation is what made fairy tales reactionary and ideological in broadening the interests of capital (10-11). Zipes also maintains that the transition from the oral tradition to print contributed to the instrumentalization of folk tales (13), as commented on by Benjamin in "The Storyteller."

During the Enlightenment, folk and fairy tales became viewed as dangerous because they incorporated critiques with utopian and ludic aspects that "challenged the rationalistic purpose and regimentation of life" (Zipes *Breaking* 17), and therefore were denigrated, dismissed, and trivialized (31). The utopian and subversive aspects of folk and fairy tales posed a threat to the new social order, one which had to be delegitimized:

> Folk and fairy tales have always spread word through their fantastic images
> about the feasibility of utopian alternatives, and this is exactly why the
> dominant social classes have been vexed by them, or have tried to dismiss

them as "Mother Goose" tales, amusing but not to be taken seriously. Beginning with the period of the Enlightenment, folk and fairy tales were regarded as useless for the bourgeois rationalization process. However, the persistence and popularity of the tales, oral and printed, suggested that their imaginative power might be more useful than previously realized. So it is not by chance that the culture industry has sought to tame, regulate and instrumentalize the fantastic projections of these tales. (Zipes *Breaking* 3-4)

These stories were infantilized and feminized, or made into "Mother Goose" tales, as part of this process of delegitimization (233). It was important to banish these narratives to arenas in which they were not perceived to exercise real power.

The Romantics, particularly those in England, France, and Germany where, as noted earlier, capitalism first took hold, attempted to recover at least some of the utopian aspects of the original tales, as well as use them as a means of criticism of "the growing alienation and banality of everyday life" (Zipes *Breaking* 31), of an increasingly administered life under capitalism. But by the Victorian period, capitalism had become entrenched and secure, and so these stories were not as disruptive. Fairy tale became the privileged form, as the folk tale was characterized as lower class and as belonging to "the domain of the household and children" (Zipes *Breaking* 32). The fantastic came to be, as Tolkien has so famously argued, "relegated to the 'nursery'" ("Fairy Stories" 34). It was then possible to reconfigure the stories (Zipes *Breaking* 17) through the subtle controls of compensation, repression, and sublimation, since active suppression was no longer necessary.

These processes of feminization and infantilization were a feature of the reinforcement of the bourgeois family. The role of the family in capitalism, particularly the privatization of family from broader communal ties and supports and its removal to the bourgeois private sphere as an underpinning of capitalist domination—while simultaneously providing a source of opposition through that private sphere—can also be seen in the history of story. Victorian fairy tales became another means of reinforcing social control, *and* existed as a repository of pre- and non-capitalist conditions and relations. The naturalization of reproductive labour, as it relates to the defense of progress and productivism, can be seen in Marxist criticism's hostility to fantasy: the charges of

escapism and romanticism can be characterized as another version of the devaluation of that which has been feminized and naturalized. This confinement to the private sphere, the individual, and daily life can also be noted in the history of the grotesque (Kayser 110). The push of the second life to art became narrowed and trivialized with the constraint to the household and the nursery, but it also served as a sanctuary that was easy to overlook or dismiss.

Zipes sees modern mass-mediated folk and fairy tales as generally affirmative (*Breaking* 20) and as de-historicized, at least partly due to their commodification and "Disneyfication" (27). However, even in highly contrived versions, he contends that the stories "all retain hope for improving conditions of life … the fantastic elements (miracles, magic) function to bring about a real fulfillment of the desires of the protagonists who were often underdogs or victims of social injustice" (33). The protagonist as underdog, fighting greater forces of injustice, is ubiquitous in fantasy, and on its surface lends credence to fantasy's radical inclinations. But it is contradictory: the desire is not necessarily to change social relations but to attain greater status (Zipes *Breaking* 33). The precapitalist context of fairy tales is decidedly feudal: patriarchal, absolutist, with a "central theme" of "'might makes right'" (35). As Bloch has said, "[c]apitalism is capitalist all over, not only in its factory owners and export quotas. Feudalism is feudal all over, not only in its ideas of loyalty, honor, and adventure" ("Art and Society" 23).

But in both fairy tale and fantasy there is a dialectic between affirmation and negation. One can see this dialectic clearly in the fairy tale's (and later, in fantasy's) use of magic. Magic corresponds to illusion (*Schein*), but also embodies anticipatory illumination (*Vor-Schein*), a magical mimesis incorporating "a historically explicable desire to overcome oppression and change society" (Zipes *Breaking* 36). Magic is representative of "hidden" or subverted power (37). Magic, and more generally the fantastic, expresses the possibility or at least the desire for social change, plays a role in helping people to cope with injustice and hope for something better (Zipes *Breaking* 39), and as noted by Federici, includes resistance to the imposed work discipline.

Here Bloch's non-synchrony is applicable, as he sees in fairy tale a wish-fulfilment that exists beyond its original historical and social context (Bloch "Fairy Tale" 163). So fairy tales are not simply backward-looking, but also forward-looking: there is within them at once a recognition of history and a projection of change, not of exact repetition, but of forward momentum. This is why fairy tales can be revived, Disneyfied, and still remain relevant. Bloch does not condescend to fairy tale readers; he states that they "think about a great deal. They think about almost everything in their lives. They, too, want to fly. They, too, want to escape the ogre. They, too, want to transcend the clouds and have a place in the sun" ("Fairy Tale" 164). Though he acknowledges that many of these wishes are petty bourgeois, that does not diminish the power of the fairy tale to be reinvented due to its "unbound character" (164). The change to the protagonist in the fairy tale toward the bourgeois subject reflects this reinvention: the hero becomes the artist or "creative individual" who goes on adventures and interacts with supernatural forces "in pursuit of a 'new world' where he will be able to develop and enjoy his talents" (Zipes *Breaking* 41). We see in fairy tale narratives the turn toward subjectivity. The new world is one of Eros, with an associated expansion of human creative faculties (Zipes *Breaking* 42).

Thus, Bloch notes that fairy tale makes great use of both magic and play ("Better Castles" 171). There is an important connection here, to pleasure, to the ludic. It becomes utopian in the sense that it is not merely about wishes, but about fulfilment, enjoyment, ease; these are things we should be able to strive for, the "land of milk and honey" (Bloch "Better Castles" 172). Bloch sees fairy tales as fragments of "uncertain utopia, which does not need to feel ashamed if it contains something more beautiful than the mundane world" (176). Nor should we feel ashamed of our similar desires. Beauty, and the ideal, can be deeper or more than illusion or appearance, as *Vor-Schein*. In relation to the quality of magic here, which is so often interpreted as illusion, Zipes explains that within these narratives, magic can serve the purpose of transcending societal boundaries and humanizing that which has been rationalized (*Breaking* 46). Ironically, magic in this context becomes a form of demystification, one responding to processes of instrumentalization; and this is just as true of fantasy. In response to Disneyfication, Zipes suggests re-estrangement (*Breaking* 118) or weirding.

The retelling of the fairy tale has been happening for decades in fantasy literature, so much so that it constitutes its own subgenre of fantasy. These retellings and reinventions can and do occur within the bounds of conventionality—becoming conventions and tropes themselves—as well as within the confines of capitalist ideology, so a new form is not necessarily a radical one. There is a tendency toward a process of "substitution," where the rebellions of protagonists against unjust systems and conditions results in the eventual assumption of the same roles and values, a transfer of power rather than structural change (Zipes *Breaking* 126). What was "broken" or opened up in the creation of the bourgeois subject is rehabilitated through a "refeudalization" (127) and our utopian desires become contained through compensation and catharsis.

Zipes turns once again to Bloch's arguments regarding the fairy tale, noting that fantasy, as a form of popular culture, still conducts our utopian wish-landscapes, and that we are drawn to these unconsciously, as we see in them the distillation of our needs and desires (*Breaking* 138-9). The magic of fantasy is related to its potential in terms of symbol and allegory, archetype and ideal, and its various forms of illusion. It is "impossible to instrumentalize fantasy completely" (Zipes *Breaking* 117) as with all art. We inevitably find ways to use what is available to us toward radical and emancipatory ends; we respond to the directions of total administration with refusal, reappropriation, and reutilization. Human imagination is stubborn, and stubbornly resistant to its own suppression, which is why repressive desublimation can be a more effective strategy of domination, but it too falls short of eradicating the imaginative push toward freedom.

3.5.   The Blochian Qualities of Tolkien

While he initially appears to be an exemplar of reactionary fantasy, the utopian impulse can also be examined in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien. It is no great stretch to cite Tolkien as the primary paradigmatic figure not just of 20th century fantasy, but of the development of fantasy as a genre, and love him or hate him, it is nigh impossible to attempt any general discussion of fantasy without addressing Tolkien in some way. The focus here will be on Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories," which has had its own substantial impact on fantasy criticism, and which dovetails with Marcuse and Bloch's

utopian aesthetics in surprising ways. This includes my own re-examination of the charge of fantasy as escapism, as a direct line of debate can be drawn from Tolkien to Miéville. Of course, all fantasy writers can link themselves to Tolkien in some way: Miéville has described him as "the Big Oedipal Daddy" of the fantastic ("Tolkien"). But this re-examination is relevant to the conceptualization of fantasy as potentially radical.

Tolkien casts fantasy's power in terms of desire and wish-fulfilment. These desires include connection or "communion" with the living world (Tolkien "Fairy Stories" 13), indicating their relative absence under conditions of rationalization and instrumentalization and a corresponding need for reconnection. Tolkien states that fairy stories "open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe" (32), describing a non-synchronous and autonomous refuge. He considers desire more important than conceptions of possibility (40-1), a focus that is replicated by Suvin, but Tolkien's meaning is that the stories are concerned with the realm of wish-images and wish-landscapes. Eros is thus a fundamental dimension of fantasy and incorporates utopian longing. Tolkien also maintains, however, that fantasy's relevance does not simply relate to dreams or dreaming, but to the potential for realization: specifically, the realization of "imagined wonder" ("Fairy Stories" 14). Tolkien perceives fairy stories to have genuine influence in the real world, to have effects that occur in the present due to fragments or "old things" that exist in the narratives (31), something akin to Bloch's fragments in the cultural heritage.

Tolkien includes four main categories as part of his mode of fairy stories: fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation ("Fairy Stories" 46). Here he is referring to fantasy as concept rather than genre. One of Tolkien's contributions to fantasy theory is his notion of sub-creation, which goes beyond representation or symbolism ("Fairy Stories" 23): sub-creation involves the formulation of an alternate or "Secondary World" (53).[76] World-building, however, is not just the creation of the world in the story, but of interior worlds. Tolkien includes imagination as one part of fantasy, with its role of "image-

---

[76] Referencing Mendlesohn and James, Attebery credits William Morris with inventing the secondary world as technique (*Stories* 22).

making" ("Fairy Stories" 47); so here we are dealing with appearance and illusion, imagination as *Schein*. Art connects imagination to sub-creation, with the latter's satisfaction being dependent on the establishment of an "'inner consistency of reality'" (Tolkien "Fairy Stories" 47). The secondary world has an essential feature of "unreality" or "unlikeness to the Primary World" (47), which roots it in estrangement (48). This estrangement is described by Attebery as a romantic effect[77] that produces possibility and a longing for something that does not yet exist and cannot be contained, the "nostalgia for what has never been experienced" (*Stories* 98).[78]

Fantasy can therefore be difficult to compose effectively because of the need to create inner consistency in something that is profoundly unfamiliar. The more distant or strange the secondary world, the more difficult it is to create a sense of credibility, what Tolkien calls "commanding Secondary Belief" ("Fairy Stories" 49). World-building is easy to do unconvincingly, which is one of the reasons why there is so much shoddy fantasy. The recycling of the instinctual, of habitual patterns and tropes, is common. To construct a new world, from the ground up, consistent and believable enough for one to be entirely immersed: this is the task of sub-creation.

Tolkien makes a further distinction between enchantment and magic. Enchantment is posited as creating a secondary world, while magic does not; rather, magic "produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World … it is not an art but a technique; its desire is *power* in this world, domination of things and wills" (Tolkien "Fairy Stories" 53). He notes that the "*spell*" refers to a "story told" as well as "a formula of power over living men" (31), which shows some similarities to the schema of naming and the logic of domination as outlined by Adorno and Horkheimer, though Tolkien is ultimately subject to this critique. The relationship to power here is not incidental and relates directly to Tolkien's critique of industrialization and modernity.[79]

---

[77] Which both compares and contrasts with Freedman's cognitive effect.

[78] Here Attebery is referencing Brecht's idea of *Verfremdungseffekt* or the alienation effect. Marcuse likewise mentions Brecht's alienation effect as a means of producing the estrangement necessary to identify one-dimensionality (*One-Dimensional* 67).

[79] This can be extended conceptually to apply to rationalization and instrumentalization, but Tolkien would not have utilized these concepts, and can be considered in many ways to be restitutionist. Zipes points to

The desire for enchantment is "the desire for a living, realised sub-creative art," which in turn is "the central desire and aspiration of human Fantasy" (Tolkien "Fairy Stories" 53-4). This is the longing for the disalienated world as it presents in the utopian function. These ideas can become problematic in Tolkien's work, where his desire for re-enchantment does not overcome his inclinations toward substitution and refeudalization.

However problematic a political outlook, Tolkien does provide us with an effective rebuttal to those who would dismiss fantasy in the name of rationality. He maintains that fantasy and reason have a direct and interdependent relationship:

> 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. If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured. If they ever get into that state (it would not seem at all impossible), Fantasy will perish, and become Morbid Delusion. (Tolkien "Fairy Stories" 55)

Fantasy does not demand the abandonment of reason; otherwise it is delusion, the kind of delusion criticized by the Frankfurt School. We must be cognizant that the argument for fantasy here is an argument against delusion and alienation, which can be extended to a demand for the rich, situated reason that includes experience described by Miéville. But Tolkien lacks consideration of reason as a tool of domination shown in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[80]

There does seem to be a conflation of delusion and escapism in criticism of fantasy. Tolkien defends escapism, refusing to describe it in negative or derogatory terms. He states that escape is often "practical" and sometimes "heroic," and argues that people should not be chastised for attempting or at least thinking of escape upon finding themselves in prison (Tolkien "Fairy Stories" 60). He maintains that critics alleging

---

Tolkien's romanticism as conservative and even regressive—but not reactionary (*Breaking* 148,177). He acknowledges that beyond an antipathy toward the excesses of industrialization, modernization, and technology, Tolkien was not particularly concerned with social or political challenges to the status quo (149).

[80] A more comprehensive argument regarding alternative formulations of reason will be presented later in this chapter through Le Guin, who makes a stronger case than Tolkien.

escapism "are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter" (Tolkien "Fairy Stories" 61). Le Guin has made similar arguments, stating that the "oldest argument" regarding both science fiction and fantasy, that they are both escapist, turns out to be "the shallowest and the profoundest," and in its shallow incarnations, this criticism is "bigotry" ("Escape Routes" 196). She accuses these critics of ignorance of the range and depth of fantasy as a vital world literary tradition due to their implicit biases and the biases inherent in their education, who therefore do not possess the necessary knowledge base to appropriately critique fantasy: "They'll come away snarling *childish*, *primitive*, *escapist*, *simplistic*, and other mantras of the school for anti-wizards, having learned nothing" (Le Guin "Critics" 30). Tolkien ("Fairy Stories" 62) and Le Guin both recognize some validity in the negative characterizations of escapism, and the reactionary or regressive tendencies in the genre, especially in its heroic forms (Le Guin "Critics" 37). But Le Guin contends that "[t]he direction of escape is toward freedom. So what is 'escapism' an accusation of?" ("It Doesn't" 83); or, stated elsewhere: "From what is one escaping, and to what?" ("Escape Routes" 196). Must escape equal abandonment? Or can it have a radical function?

Using Michael Moorcock's argument from his "Epic Pooh" essay,[81] Miéville has countered that Tolkien's claims are not based in the reality of the situation, but on a misunderstanding; that "Jailers love escapism. What they hate is escape" ("Tolkien"). His views on Tolkien have been modified over the years, but the main thrust of his argument is that a work is escapist if it "loses its sense of the complex, oppressive totality of life" ("With One"). The escapism being critiqued here is the oversimplification of the problems and realities we face as human beings, which results in a skewed perspective. The goal of literature, as Kafka has said, should be to "be the axe for the frozen sea inside us" ("Letter" 15-16). I would suggest that having somewhere else to go when trapped in an untenable situation not only helps people survive, it may engender "real escape" at some point. The argument that labels escape as escapism asserts that it is avoidant and makes people complacent, and only direct confrontation with harsh reality serves to motivate people toward change. But what if that's not true? What if it is the constant

---

[81] For more detail, see Moorcock's *Wizardry & Wild Romance*, which includes an introduction by Miéville.

grinding cruelty of reality that breaks people into submission, and the brief escape into a different reality is what gives them the heart to fight or leave? Why would you fight or leave if there is never the option that life, even imaginary life, could be different, if another life is unimaginable? This is why the idea of refuge in fantasy is central to my argument. Refuge offers safety, rest, recuperation, it is a space made to keep people alive, to preserve what is alive, but the goal is always to return to the world.

Fantasy can and does include deeply distressing and challenging material, at both individual and social levels, and while escapist—in the sense of going somewhere else— does not inherently avoid reality. Le Guin is not at odds with Miéville, but she traces a moral function at work in the criticism of fantasy most visible in its censorship, where a puritanical dislike encompasses "a disapproval so intense, and often so aggressive, that [she] cannot help but see it as arising, fundamentally, from fear" ("Dragons" 29). This disapproval is both "antifantasy" and "antifiction," viewing "all works of the imagination either as suspect, or as contemptible" (Le Guin "Dragons" 30).[82] If a fantastic work makes an attempt at "asserting the existence of a primary, vivid world, an intenser reality," then it can be said to be trying for escape: going toward rather than running from, and in this context, Le Guin asserts that "Tolkien is right" ("Escape Routes" 196-7). But the opposite also happens: the escape from complexity and uncertainty to a one-dimensional place "where human suffering is something that can be *cured*"; which is "no escape from the phony … [but] an escape into the phony. This doesn't take us in the direction of the great myths and legends, which is always toward an intensification of the mystery of the real. This takes us the other way, toward a rejection of reality … We have escaped by locking ourselves in jail" (Le Guin "Escape Routes" 197). In this way, moralizing stories constitute another form of escapism by presenting a definitive or right answer, as opposed to wading into the messiness and uncertainty involved in trying to understand (Le Guin "Escape Routes" 197-8).

It is here that Tolkien's ideas of consolation become more problematic than any contention of escape. Tolkien saw as most important the "Consolation of the Happy

---

[82] Attebery notes that in their attacks on fantasy, these types of detractors are expressing convictions that it is, in fact, not trivial (*Stories* 16).

Ending" or what he called "*eucatastrophe*" ("Fairy Stories" 68). This he ties to Christian notions of resurrection and redemption. The happy ending, flying in the face of all evidence to the contrary, refuses any "universal final defeat" (69). He describes it as "a peculiar quality of 'joy'" that in fact signals "a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is not only a 'consolation' for the sorrow of the world, but a satisfaction" (71). The happy ending was neither a necessary nor uniform feature of unadulterated folk and fairy tales, which could be terrible and tragic; it is, rather, a feature of the commodified fairy tale. Though Tolkien appears to strive toward something like Marcusean and Blochian notions of aesthetic truth, the sense of satisfaction achieved in his picture of consolation does indicate closure, resolution, catharsis. Marcuse argues for refuge instead of the happy ending:

> In the transforming mimesis, the image of liberation is fractured by reality. If art were to promise that at the end good would triumph over evil, such a promise would be refuted by historical truth. In reality it is evil which triumphs, and there are only islands of good where one can find refuge for a brief time. Authentic works of art are aware of this; they reject the promise made too easily; they refuse the unburdened happy end. They must reject it, for the realm of freedom lies beyond mimesis. The happy ending is "the other" of art. (*Aesthetic* 47)

These islands of good recall Bloch's utopian fragments and can clarify that fantasy as refuge does not mean avoidance. Tolkien is trying to create, through a sub-created world, a transcendent whole. As Marcuse shows, it is de-historicized, purified of necessary critical qualities.[83]

Fantasy's reclamation project of these utopian fragments inspires recovery. Tolkien's definition incorporates the "return and renewal of health" which he sees as the "regaining of a clear view" ("Fairy Stories" 57). This sense of clarity has Blochian connotations of health, with liberating qualities. Fantasy, in the attempt to both recover

---

[83] Though the lack of historicization is important, Gifford offers an alternative critique of Tolkien, emphasizing that his position is part of a shift in theory that first took place in the 1940s reflecting a turn outward, away from considerations of inwardness ("Goblin" 553; *Modernist* 59, 61). He is therefore able to trace a direct line from Tolkien to Jameson and Monleón ("Goblin" 555, *Modernist* 61), one I think would be important to explore further. Gifford characterizes Tolkien's work as missing "self-reflexive interiorities" (*Modernist* 80), and it therefore misses the crucial dimension of the inner experience important to radical fantasy.

the old and create something new, releases something held within us: it "may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds … you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you" (Tolkien "Fairy Stories" 59). This intimates escape, but this version of escape frees thoughts from the boundaries of interior worlds; it is the escape of thoughts out into the world. Moreover, these thoughts, potent and free, possess their own power and influence.

While the argument regarding consolation's closure does seem to have teeth, there is perhaps not enough attention paid to the role of recovery, nor to the problematic aspects of catharsis in relation to recovery. For Tolkien, the most important elements of fairy tale and fantasy are that they act not only as compensation but as "a healer for the injuries which human beings had to bear" (Zipes *Breaking* 177). The importance placed on catharsis in relation to art is largely based on an idea of excess energies, which must be diffused or defused in some way. Likewise, critiques using this function assume a similar abundance accepted as a given. One could argue, however, that life under late capitalism is rather one of overwork and overwhelm, where energies are already siphoned off for the purposes of production, reproduction, and consumption. The need for catharsis is less pronounced when one is dealing with an overextended and exhausted population: what is left to liquidate?

Though one could point to the need for catharsis in relation to trauma, either way there seems to be a great need for recovery. Adorno and Horkheimer address recovery in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, noting that leisure can easily become a means of preparing the individual for more work. Acknowledging that there is truth in this, we can still make room for notions of recovery as a means of restoring health, vibrancy, and experience; and we must. The energies which have been drained need to be restored, for how can we resist without energy? And hope infuses us with new energy and motivation.[84] Zipes

---

[84] I acknowledge that anger and the desire for justice can also provide energy and motivation, may pull an individual out of despair, and may be necessary to revolutionary action, but can likewise descend to a vicious desire for retribution. The relationship of anger to recovery is less clear, though it can be part of processing trauma and addressing injustice. Fantasy need not expunge anger for bad hope, and there is

emphasizes the importance of hope in our motives to engage with fantasy. When asked in an interview how he became interested in fantasy, he said the following:

> Ever since I was eight-years-old I began writing stories and sitting on floors in libraries and reading myself into other realms … I think, like many people, I find our reality so disturbing, so unfulfilling, so corrupt, and so barbaric that I began conceiving alternatives to our social condition. All good literature provides hope, but the best of fantasy literature provides extraordinary hope, and I guess that is what I am after—extraordinary hope. (Zipes in Bannerman)

The idea that utopian elements in fantasy can be healing and revitalizing is not discussed enough. Here Bloch's notions of brightness and healthiness are useful, not in the recycling of instinctual patterns, but in the imaginative anticipation of the fulfilment of needs.

Zipes points out that both Bloch's and Tolkien's defenses of fantasy rail against "the same 'dragon of dehumanization'" (*Breaking* 150) and that fantasy could be seen to "offset instrumental rationalization and call forth our authentic utopian impulses" (149). In transitions to new socio-economic structures—from feudalism to capitalism, or the industrial age to the information age—some of our needs and desires are left behind, ignored, dismissed, belittled in the name of progress. These needs do not simply disappear, but remain stuck in and between time, liminal, as fragments and tendencies (Zipes *Breaking* 158). Thus, Zipes notes that "[t]he fantastic form of the fairy tale carries a realistic lode of what is open-ended and fragmentary but can still be realized" (159). In this context, when discussing escapism, one is speaking of a disjunction or estrangement "from a defeating situation which induces a feeling of possible liberation" (159). This is also Le Guin's insistence that escape is a move toward freedom. Escape need not be equated with pacification (Zipes *Breaking* 176). It includes as fundamental the element of hope, which is central to Bloch's thinking.

Fantasy, in this context, becomes "a form of protest against irrational confinement" and rationalization using both Bloch's and Tolkien's perspectives (Zipes

---

complexity in these relationships. Does anger negate hope? Not necessarily. Can they be mutually supportive in praxis? Likely so.

Breaking 162). For Tolkien, estrangement results in a greater appreciation of both the past and the familiar and allows us to connect to the past in a non-synchronous way through the everyday (Zipes *Breaking* 162). Zipes describes fantasy as "revelation," which is an imaginative magic that projects other ways of thinking:

> The psychical and physical energy which goes into synthesizing images of the imagination in a fantastic work of art is a power that is closely associated with magic, for this power of fantasy is propelled by imaginings of changed circumstances and conditions. The roots of the imagistic projections lie in the very matter of existence and being which calls for a satisfactory response and will continually demand this until the want is stilled, not repressed. Since reason cannot entirely articulate and fulfill our needs and has actually been instrumentalized to govern or curb them, imagination rises up in protest and invents stratagems to undo the way the rational has been made irrational. (164)

Fantasy here is active work toward the realization of anticipatory wishes and hopes. It involves direct resistance to rationalization through the imagination.

And in both Bloch and Tolkien, there are religious, spiritual, messianic overtones. Bloch's utopian hope comprises a kind of "secularization of religion" (Zipes *Breaking* 164) in its connection to "sensual and spiritual fulfillment which runs contrary to the exploitative goals of capitalism" (168), to be realized through the concrete utopia. Tolkien's consolation could be seen as the opposite, as the sanctification of hope. For Bloch, these anticipations of a better world can be concretized, but exist already as critical components of aesthetic experience. This is one area where Tolkien falls short: though he reaches to the past and uses what he finds for recovery, he gets stuck (Zipes *Breaking* 174). He does not imagine his way into possible futures, nor does he open up horizons for them. He forecloses many possible futures. Bloch, on the other hand, is interested looking to the past, to cultural heritage, for the purposes of anticipatory illumination: to create something new, a different and more fulfilling way of life.

3.6. Wonder in Fantasy: On Wonder as Mode of Knowledge

At the beginning of this thesis, I described the feeling invoked by fantasy as that of wonder and discovery, and now propose that wonder is an integral part of the

experience and understanding of fantastic narratives. Wonder as a mode of knowledge involves ideas of art as reality and experience as cognition,[85] and informs us of the enduring impact of fantasy on the child. Tolkien references "imagined wonder" as central to fantasy's power, and it is worthy of examination in this context, though it has a much longer history.[86] Wonder ignites in us both exhilaration and trepidation. There are in wonder aspects of miracles and marvels, of joyous delight, but also awe and even fear. Wonder is thus an "elusive" concept (Vasalou "Wonder" 17), which is not inclined toward "proposed regimentations of its logic, by virtue of lacking the distinguishable rational core that appears to characterize most other emotions" (32). Critical to this definition is the conceptualization of wonder as emotion, but as different from other emotions in its resistance to categorization[87] and in the proposed absence of a "rational core"—which is subject to the same criticisms of rationality presented previously.

Historically, wonder has been associated with religion, but also, through religion, became equated with ignorance and fear (Vasalou "Wonder" 37). Distance was created between religious experience and those elements of wonder that could be connected to supposed superstition. In this discussion of fantasy, we see with wonder a process of disavowal by both religion and rationalism: wonder comes to be perceived in opposition to Enlightenment values of reason and rationality and associated with magic and the irrational. In the 17th century, wonder was rehabilitated as a form of curiosity, making it less threatening and more amenable to the rationalism and positivism consistent with the development of capitalism, where wonder was recast as a form of consumption and its older forms were abandoned (Vasalou "Wonder" 38-9).

The eventual pre-eminence of the Aristotelian over the Platonic also corresponded with this reassignation of wonder as curiosity (Vasalou "Wonder" 51). Aristotle deems

---

[85] This has been noted by Jerry Zaslove in his comments on this thesis.

[86] Sophia Vasalou notes that the Greek root, *thauma*, has mythological origins relating to the god Thaumas, who generated both radiance and monstrousness in his offspring Iris and the Harpies ("Wonder" 53). In fantasy literature, wonder is connected to magic and transformation; the term *thaumaturgy* is used for magical powers and practices in Miéville's Bas-Lag. I would also note that Donna Haraway presents the Harpies as chthonic entities, representing grotesque powers (54).

[87] This resistance to categorization is also true of fantasy, as noted throughout this thesis.

wonder, or the marvellous, to be a requirement of tragedy (255; 1460a13). He also leaves room for the impossible: not once but twice in his *Poetics* he states that "[f]or the purposes of poetry a likely impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing possibility" (259; 1460a26, 263; 1461b11). This acceptance of possibilities and their artistic merit would seem to indicate that an Aristotelian argument could be amenable to fantasy's aims, with wonder as a functional component. But for Aristotle, wonder must be "liquidated by explanation" (Vasalou "Introduction" 7). And like other emotions, it is to be purged through catharsis. Aristotelian concepts of wonder posit the universe as ordered, and wonder introduces uncertainty and "incoherence" which must be resolved (Vasalou "Wonder" 51). Wonder's unfamiliarity "is experienced as a limitation of one's own power, and more specifically of the power one wields through the ability to explain" (51-2). This clarifies how wonder can be disruptive and why it must be diminished or dismissed: it disturbs the explanatory schema and thus, the narrative power of the existing social order.

Wonder's incoherent elements are contemplated in Romantic conceptions of the sublime, in relation to wonder's estranging qualities. Wonder induces a defamiliarization of the ordinary (Vasalou "Introduction" 4), and along with notions of beauty and the ideal there can be more terrible aspects of wonder that instill awe or fear. It is likely through the process of wonderment that estrangement can take on "bright" utopian connotations. Zipes explains that Bloch's estrangement, *Staunen*, was meant to startle or shock, but also to inspire a sense of wonder:

> Bloch liked to generate a sense of *Staunen* in his readers. In German, *Staunen* implies not only startlement but astonishment, wonder, and staring, and the formation of his philosophical categories compels us to pause and reconsider what we think, where we are, and what we want to look for. Most of all, Bloch's *Staunen* as conveyed in his philosophical discussions of art and literature convey [sic] a reverence for human creation and nature in all their aspects. ("Introduction" xxxi)

The quality of reverence relates to the revelatory or world-disclosive aspects of art. Bloch's analysis of the fairy tale includes this sense of wonderment as fundamental ("Better Castles" 176).

Here we can begin to conceive of wonder as a mode of knowledge. In art, it does seem to indicate an aesthetic dimension that operates independently, with wonder as different in kind, indicating a substantive alteration from mundane experience. Descartes put wonder forth as the first of the passions, as first experience and as a means through which we filter other experiences (Vasalou "Wonder" 26-8). If so, wonder is formative, integral to the way in which we learn and comprehend the world. If we perceive wonder to have primacy, to be fundamental to our first experiences as well as distinct from ordinary experience, then we make wonder into a "gatekeeper of experience" (Vasalou "Wonder" 28). Vasalou suggests that "we imply as much when we keep coming back to children as the paradigm in which wonder must be thought" (28). There is something about wonder which we are expected as children to intuitively understand, which is assigned to children as inherent. If we are deprived of it as adults, to experience it only as part of peak experiences, then the reason for this diminishment of experience must be examined. The simple claim that we grow out of wonder as we come to know more about the world—consistent with Aristotle's liquidation—does not adequately address the context through which wonder is systematically expelled from experience; wonder is likewise exiled to the nursery.

The claim that children are more prone to wonder and fantasy because they are more credulous does not stand up to scrutiny. Tolkien argues that the simple suspension of disbelief is not what is at work in terms of the power and effect of fantasy and fairy stories; that rather, one has access to a sub-created world ("Fairy Stories" 37). The mark of a successful story is that one need not actively suspend disbelief (38), because one is absorbed by that world: because it is believable. Tolkien also maintains that there is no "special childish 'wish to believe'" (40). Wonder as a mode seems to be accepted as part of childhood, but is penalized in adults, which is odd considering it is a significant way in which we teach and interact with children. Wonder informs children's stories; it exists as part of play. Why do we so completely sanction an activity of supposedly little importance to adult lives? What does this mean for the creation of knowledge if we are taught as children to not only see the world as it appears, but also to enter secondary worlds? This is a faculty we can experience easily enough as adults—which is exemplified in the enjoyment of fantasy literature—but we are shamed for doing so. Why

do we allow these stories to persist, why do we teach them to children, only to denounce and belittle them in adulthood?

This is possible because they are no longer seen as threatening, but that does not explain why we go to the effort in the first place. I suspect that we want children to have some experience of this alternate life while it is still permitted; it is an indulgence and even a small rebellion. But ultimately it is disciplinary: requiring first knowledge and experience of the mode—perhaps as a remnant of precapitalist forms of knowing, and as Bloch's utopian remnants or fragments—and then its forced abandonment. One conquers the fantasy world by growing up and discarding it, taking on the mantle of work and productivity. It is spirit-breaking. The giving up of childish things requires an internalization of obedience and a demonstration of self-mastery. Actively imagining another kind of life and then surrendering it validates the logic of sacrifice and renunciation. This disciplinary process occurs in both rationalist and religious frameworks: we are taught wonder, immersed in it, shaped by it, and then told that if we retain it, we are at best immature, at worst hysterical. We are taught that wonder is illusion, escapism, consolation. Wonder is childlike, to be indulged occasionally but never taken seriously.

And yet, it is in moments of wonder that we briefly regain the sense of what was lost or missing. It is the seemingly indescribable feeling that we all know intimately, when part of the world that was unknown or closed to us is opened, and we are presented with a new vista, a shifted horizon to which we must orient ourselves on somewhat shaky feet. We encounter our "dream of a thing," begun in the past and continuing through our "imaginative wonder," striving toward realization. Wonder involves a sense of communion or connection to the world around us, and the revelatory quality to which both Tolkien and Bloch allude. One could say that to envision the utopian, we need to do more than want or wish for it: we need to wonder about it.

Wonder in fantastic literature is therefore structural, within the narratives themselves and as ground for a mode of knowledge, not "a feeble perfume" but elemental, and "the closer you look the stronger the sense of wonder" (Le Guin "Escape

Routes" 195). By looking to Le Guin, we can see in her aesthetic of wonder that building fantastic worlds is discovery ("Dreams" 40), and the purpose or function of fantasy is "'pleasure or delight'" as well as a complex and expanded understanding of both internal and external worlds and relationships ("Dragons" 33). It includes the "search for joy" (Le Guin "Stone Ax" 216) which is related to and differentiated from pleasure in its association with wonder.

Le Guin, consistent with the idea of wonder as a mode of knowledge, emphasizes that fantasy's place in childhood and with the child is not inconsequential but pivotal: "People who are threatened by the imagination usually dismiss works of fantasy as 'childish.' Though the dismissal is a confession of impotence, the description is exact. In the creation and preservation of fantasy worlds, the role of the child seems central" ("Do-It-Yourself"114). Fantasy contains worlds that have been and continue to be created for "the sake of a child," either a specific child or children generally (Le Guin "Do-It-Yourself" 114), and that "may be saved by a child," that "child who is the Self" (115). This is not something we should grow out of, as we are told, nor is it trivial in journeys to adulthood. Le Guin observes that "[a] tale we heard at four years old may have a deep and abiding effect on our mind and spirit, but we aren't likely to be clearly aware of it as adults—unless asked to think about it seriously" ("Wilderness" 11). These narratives continue to influence us in ways that we may not acknowledge or even perceive, which in some causes anxiety (Le Guin "Wilderness" 11). Le Guin remarks that "[t]here should be a word—maturismo, like machismo?—for the anxious savagery of the intellectual who thinks his adulthood has been impugned" ("Re-Reading" 21).

How is it possible to assume that this influence can really be left in the past once a person becomes an adult, that there is no deep, lasting, meaningful effect? That it can all be discarded like outgrown clothing? Giving it up is discipline—it is enactment of sacrifice. The hopes of the child, of the past, of the dream, must be burned upon the altar of progress. And every co-option of fantasy repeats this process: they, too, are sacrifices. But is this process wholly effective? Can we inspire not only a passion for fantasy in children, but a fantastic way of perceiving the world, and then ferret it out of the mind? How deeply does fantasy change us? Le Guin asserts that "in an individual's life [the

100

fantastic is] likely to be the earliest and most permanent experience of story" ("Why Kids" 132). She observes that the books we return to throughout life are often fantasy: "books in which magic works, or animals speak, or the laws of physics yield to the laws of the human psyche" (Le Guin "Re-Reading" 20) and that fantasy is remarkable in its ability to "cross age-lines" (Le Guin "Re-Reading" 22). Le Guin notes that in the refuge of the nursery to which it had been banished, fantasy "flourished so brilliantly that people began to perceive imaginative fiction as being 'for children'" ("Re-Reading" 21). It was here that fantasy continued to be nurtured, allowed to exert an influence neither visible nor acknowledged, but nonetheless deep and formative. In this safe haven, imaginative fiction became a means of "mak[ing] sense out of reality" (Le Guin "Why Kids" 132), one that some of us keep using throughout our lifetimes.

Le Guin views imagination as an "essential human faculty" that engages "the free play of the mind," with children's play as a crucial part of the process of maturing ("Dragons" 31). She proposes, along with Miéville, that fantasy is a game: it can be simple and joyful, or it can be "a game played for very high stakes" (Le Guin "From Elfland" 74). As a high stakes game—as art—it is "a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence. It is not antirational, but pararational; not realistic, but surrealistic, superrealistic, a heightening of reality" (74). The idea of the pararational and of superrealism provides a counterpoint to Monleón's unreason where "the impossible, the incredible, the fantastic all suggest the limitations and the falsity of ordinary perception" (Le Guin "Critics" 33). The emphasis on realism and rationality in this context results in "[t]he tendency to explain fantasy by extracting the fantastic from it and replacing it with the comprehensible [which] reduces the radically unreal to the secondhand commonplace" (Le Guin "Critics" 34-5). Fantastic and imaginative literature, though not objectively realistic or rational, points to obscured truths:

> For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom. (Le Guin "Dragons" 34).

The idea of freedom is prominent in Le Guin's criticism and possesses an element of refusal similar to that articulated by Marcuse.

People have learned to fear the imagination, but not to train it (Le Guin "Dragons" 31-2). Le Guin gives people credit for being "easily frightened, but also brave and stubborn" ("Stone Ax" 224) and suggests that they will engage with art when given the chance. She presents imaginative literature as a route to "training the imagination and opening alternatives," and as such it "offers self-guidance" (Le Guin "Why Kids" 133). In training the mind to approach the world with creativity and curiosity, to be adaptable, and to reject lesser versions of the world that require lesser selves, fantasy, at its best, is difficult and challenging. It requires "discipline of the imagination" in method or technique; "To be free, after all, is not to be undisciplined" (Le Guin "Dragons" 31). This is not the same as the imposed, coercive discipline or the internalization of self-mastery in circumstances of domination but is a process of preparing and fostering growth.

A disciplined imagination, in this sense, is precisely not escapism, but a thoughtful exercising of the mind's faculties, including the imaginative faculty. It is the repressed imagination that becomes funnelled into "ego-centered daydreaming" and "wishful thinking" (Le Guin "Dragons" 32). Le Guin defends the imagination in the name of another kind of maturity, presenting maturity as "not an outgrowing, but a growing up … an adult is not a dead child, but a child who survived" ("Dragons" 34); and particularly, one who survived with a functioning imaginative capacity. The use of growing up here relates to the journey downward and inward, the chthonic descent to the unconscious, where one eventually resurfaces, bringing knowledge. Growing up is surviving with this knowledge rather than abandoning it, and reflects a maturity that can only be brought about through the expression of imagination as a human faculty.

3.7.   The Green Country of Fantasy

If wonder is a mode of thought in fantasy, then its setting provides the context, and in mythic fantasy, that setting is most often the green of nature and a life lived in seeming harmony with it. The "green country" of the natural world and the countryside

has been a predominant setting in high fantasy, with a "green, underpopulated world of towns and small cities surrounded by wilderness" (Le Guin "Critics" 37). This strikes the reader as "a return to the world of folktale," or, more broadly, to "the world we call, since it is no longer natural to us, 'nature'" (37). The forest of fantasy appears as an archetypal mythic setting, which Le Guin describes as a kind of fantastic national park, a place where people go "to get in touch with reality in a special, private, profound fashion" ("From Elfland" 73). As with parks, people bring with them an "encapsulated … secondhand reality" (73); they bring their baggage, internal and external, which keeps them from direct experience, confined to the tourist experience.

The tourist experience of fantasy is catered to through co-option. People have a great deal of longing for fantasy's green country: they "want to go there, without knowing what it is they're really looking for, driven by a vague hunger for something real" (Le Guin "From Elfland" 73), but end up with the tourist experience, with kitsch.[88] Le Guin cautions that fantasy's green country "is a real wilderness, and those who go there should not feel too safe. And their guides, the writers of fantasy, should take their responsibilities seriously" ("From Elfland" 74). When fantasy gets it wrong, it is because "something real has been falsified" (75). This is important in high fantasy because there is only the secondary world. Le Guin maintains that while it is the responsibility of the fantasy writer to take their work seriously, it is the responsibility of the reader "to refuse to be fooled" by the manipulations and co-option of the genre ("From Elfland" 85).

We pass into the green country of fantasy "with ease and pleasure"; it is "familiar" to the inner landscape, if not the actual one (Le Guin "Critics" 37), a convergence of memory and dream. Beyond nostalgia, it is "grief" for what has been and is being lost; that "modern humanity is in exile, shut out from a community, an intimacy, it once knew. They do not so much lament, perhaps, as remind" (Le Guin "Critics" 38).[89]

---

[88] The attraction to fantasy's actual theme parks, such as that of Pandora–The World of *Avatar* at Disneyworld, has been noted by Sherryl Vint and describes the tourist experience. Participants return to the same rides over and over, looking for something real in the experience but never quite achieving the satisfaction they seek (Vint).

[89] With this intimacy there has also been a casual cruelty, toward other people and the non-human world, of which we should be careful to remind ourselves as well.

Being reminded is important: when referring to the past, the point is not to recreate it, but to be reminded of it. Fantasy's green country is populated by an extended and often undifferentiated model of life that is emotional and embodied (Le Guin "Message" 127). Fantasy's green country, at its best, situates worlds of particulars and qualities in an expansion, rather than constriction, of the given reality:

> In reinventing the world of intense, unreproducible, local knowledge, seemingly by a denial or evasion of current reality, fantasists are perhaps trying to assert and explore a larger reality than we now allow ourselves. They are trying to restore the sense—to regain the knowledge—that there is somewhere else, anywhere else, where other people may live another kind of life.
>
> The literature of imagination, even when tragic, is reassuring, not necessarily in the sense of offering nostalgic comfort, but because it offers a world large enough to contain alternatives and therefore offers hope. (Le Guin "Critics" 40-1)

The "extraordinary hope" offered by fantasy is that of a rich, expansive, unalienated existence, one that not only requires imagining but rejoices in it. The fantastic has always been imaginative and is still to be found in the imagination: it is always what could be. The experience of fantasy as dreamlike, but in its radical forms as moving toward awakening and actualization, is described in the reconfigurations of the modern romantic, to be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4.

Reconfiguration (The Modern Romantic)

The world is broken. But there is something restorative that is possible, a recovery. We make these possibilities grow by digging in the dirt, deep underground and deep in the psyche, and planting seeds. Between rupture and reconfiguration there is reclamation and salvage: we take the remnants of what has been and feed the new with them. Working with a fractured reality, we build alternatives from a fragmentary substrate. We adapt and reconfigure until something flourishes. Where rupture and reconnection result in a formative change of perspective, there is growth and potential for re-embodiment. This appears in the surreal and uncategorizable, in works that dissolve the limitations and trappings of genre.

The processes of rupture, reconnection, and reconfiguration, as shown in the gothic and mythic orientations I have presented so far, are indications of the ways in which the romantic aesthetics of fantasy literature and its ethical values are approached stylistically. In examinations of the gothic, the focus has been on rupture: on alienation, estrangement, disconnection from the "totality." In the mythic, the focus has been on a reconnection of some sort, which can be progressive or regressive, though notions of disalienation have inherently subversive elements, even in affirmative works. These orientations can both be re-oriented and reconfigured, and this is a feature of the modern romantic as it occurs in fantasy. In this chapter, I attempt to consolidate the grounding of fantasy in romanticism by referring back to Löwy and Sayre, explaining how romanticism's worldview is not replaced by modernism but includes attempts at re-enchanting the modern, creating a modernist fantastic that is clearly seen, in its romantic expression, in surrealism. Fantasy as genre can therefore be viewed as belonging to a modern romanticism, and in its communication of the inner experience, addresses the modern subject and subjectivity. Benjamin's ideas of intoxication and awakening in *The Arcades Project* provide the basis for perceiving radical fantasy as an attempt to encounter the critical moment between catastrophe and actualization. Kristen Ross' description of communal luxury in the Paris Commune provides a material example of

the revolutionary struggle to actualize a utopian community, giving inspiration to those who would make art lived, which I will continue to outline as an open and ongoing exploration of the modern romantic.

4.1. Romanticism and Modernism: The Modern Romantic

In returning to Löwy and Sayre's discussion of romanticism, I would like to extend the idea of fantasy as an inner experience. In romanticism's meeting with modernism, we can see a tension between a movement outward, to the material and concrete, and inward to subjectivity, pushing the boundaries of exploration even further in the attempt to expand consciousness.[90] The Romantic response to rationalist abstraction was "a return to the concrete": to tradition and the local (Löwy and Sayre 40). This included "a rehabilitation of nonrational and/or nonrationalizable behaviors," in emotion, intuition, and instinct (41). The nonrational provides "the delimitation of psychic spheres that are not reducible to reason" (41). The dissolution of social bonds and the accompanying alienation, isolation, alienated individualism, and egoism brought about through severance, enclosure, and domination also resulted in the loss of ability to "penetrate the subjectivity of others" (Löwy and Sayre 42).

The development of the individual bourgeois subject created a divide felt as isolation and alienation, with the rational pitted against the nonrational.[91] In romanticism, this has been met with artistic "attempts to rediscover the lost community and bring it into the imaginary universe" (Löwy and Sayre 42). There is an integral relationship here between the development of the individual subject and fantasy as a space of refuge for the imagination. In popular culture, even in limited and domesticated forms, the values

---

[90] I am drawing these "turns" outward and inward partly from Gifford ("Goblin" 553; *Modernist* 59). He observes the conflict in Marxism's theory of fantasy as shown in the Suvinian and Jamesonian paradigms; while I have characterized this conflict as occurring within Marxism, he presents it as a conflict between Marxism and anarchism, with similar outcomes in the dismissal of fantasy ("Goblin" 553-4; *Modernist* 3-4). He presents the move to inwardness and subjectivity as consistent with anarchist influences. I think that both of our positions pick up on the same process, with overlapping concepts and intertwining threads pointing to something like an anarcho-romantic paradigm, and that there is much here to warrant further research.

[91] We can see examples of this modernist fantastic in texts like Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* or Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.

within romanticism reveal dreams and desires that have not yet been annihilated. These romantic elements tap into emotion and particularly the feelings of loss that make up "the Romantic syndrome" as "part of modern subjectivity," which are forced into representation through the culture industry (Löwy and Sayre 226).

Attempts to rupture the mystification and control of the culture industry as well as to re-enchant using the nonrational are expressed in surrealism. Surrealism's intention has been to "go beyond the limits of 'art'—as a separate, institutionalized, ornamental activity—and embark on the limitless adventure of reenchanting the world" (Löwy and Sayre 216). Löwy, in *Morning Star*, describes it as:

> … a movement of the human spirit in revolt and an eminently subversive attempt … to reestablish the "enchanted" dimensions at the core of human existence—poetry, passion, mad love, imagination, magic, myth, the marvelous, dreams, revolt, utopian ideals—which have been eradicated by this civilization and its values … Surrealism is a protest against narrow-minded rationality, the commercialization of life, petty thinking, and the boring realism of our money-dominated, industrial society. It is also the utopian and revolutionary aspiration to "transform life"—an adventure that is at once intellectual and passionate, political and magical, poetic and dreamlike. (1)

Surrealism, therefore, motivates rupture in protest and revolt; finds reconnection in myth and dream; and conjures re-enchantment in a poetic reconfiguration that aims at transformation.

Surrealism thus reconciles this demystification of Enlightenment rationalism and capitalist occultism with the imaginative potentialities offered by myth. Early surrealists thought that myth was "too precious a gem to be abandoned to the Fascist mythmakers" (Löwy and Sayre 217). They were drawn to myth as "a secular alternative to the religious stranglehold on access to the nonrational," with forays into esoterism (217). Myth, in this context, has a utopian function (218). Löwy and Sayre refer to André Breton and his idea that surrealism could create "'a collective myth'"; comparison to the gothic was invoked because the Gothic fantastic "carried an explosive psychic charge" and had revolutionary

associations, particularly to the French Revolution (217).[92] Breton's "'Gothic Marxism'" was therefore "a historical materialism sensitive to the marvelous, to the dark moment of revolt" (Löwy 22). Breton integrated the magical and the occult in his surrealist mythopoesis: Löwy contends that he "defined magic as 'all human operations having as their goal the imperious domination of the forces of nature through the use of secret practices of a more or less irrational character,'" which "'implies protest, even revolt'" (35). He saw religion as "the domain of resignation, begging, and penitence" which leads to submission to authority and then transgression (Löwy 37). From this perspective, Breton can be seen as highlighting the idea of magic as power and control or mastery, though he gives it a rebellious quality.[93]

Surrealism invokes the transformation of the world, which begins and appears in the liminal. In his essay on surrealism, Benjamin comments that the surreal is akin to dream, where "[l]ife seemed worth living only where the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away in everyone as if by the toing and froing of streams of images" ("Surrealism" 145). This threshold between dreaming and awakening corresponds to an idea of "*secular illumination*" (146) that seems consistent with Blochian illumination. But Benjamin also incorporates a "dialectic of intoxication" ("Surrealism" 147). Intoxication can be described as dream experienced through the sensuous world, and it is here that "speech, magical spell, and concept intermingle" (151). This is not intoxication as oblivion but as possessing an emotional quality that connects the dream to experience and that encompasses a longing for release from the forces of reason.[94]

---

[92] Here Löwy and Sayre contradict Monleón in offering a revolutionary interpretation of the Gothic fantastic.

[93] This view of magic echoes the logic of domination in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but in Löwy and Sayre's description it seems that Breton challenges the totalizing effects of the logic of domination, or its presence in the schema of myth, through this idea of rebelliousness as rupture. Löwy defends Breton's view as not being about control, but about poetry (38). A detailed analysis of Breton's perspective on magic, and its expression in his work, in relation to magical mimesis would be of interest.

[94] With thanks to Jerry Zaslove for this clarification in his comments on this thesis. Hannah Arendt discusses this idea in her introduction to *Illuminations*. She comments that Benjamin "*thought poetically*" (14) and that "he understood language as an essentially poetic phenomenon" (50). His collecting of fragments involved the uncovering of "the rich and the strange," not to "resuscitate" the past but to recognize where it had "crystallized into new forms and shapes" (50). These ideas will be expanded on in the discussion of *The Arcades Project*.

Benjamin, like Breton, characterizes surrealism as possessing an explosive element. Various qualities of age and the "antiquated," poverty, "shabbiness," all that is run-down, breaking down, falling apart, can "flip suddenly into revolutionary nihilism" to "cause the mighty forces of 'atmosphere' that lie hidden in these things to explode" (Benjamin "Surrealism" 148). The volatility of the surreal appears in objects and the histories that can be traced through them, acting as fragmentary maps to and from the past, which are merged with dream and imagination. But Benjamin questions whether surrealists can "bind revolt to revolution" or channel "the forces of intoxication for the revolution" ("Surrealism" 156). He refers to the Romantic as non-dialectical, in contrast with the surreal, due to a lack of connection to the everyday, to experience (157). However, through Löwy and Sayre we can see how the surreal is a romantic form blurring art and life.

4.2.   Intoxication and Awakening in *The Arcades Project*

In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin expands on these notions of intoxication and secular illumination through a detailed observation and examination of the objects and buildings of Paris. In his close attention to the architecture of Paris and its embedded figurations and concepts, Benjamin comments that the "vain attempts" of failed technologies and the initial misuse of materials in production are indicative of processes "in the grip of dreams. (Not architecture alone but all technology is, at certain stages, evidence of a collective dream.)" (*Arcades* 152).[95] It is the collector who notices and then "actualizes latent archaic representations of property" in objects (209). The latent in the object is the realization existing only as a tendency. Collecting is therefore "struggle against dispersion" and the making of a "patchwork" (Benjamin *Arcades* 211) of potentialities.[96] Collectors and scholars of folk and fairy tales could similarly be acting against the dispersion of latent ideas and tendencies in stories, with fantasy authors

---

[95] These dreams represent the kinds of viable alternatives present in technology before choices are made and horizons are narrowed, as explained by Feenberg.

[96] Arendt describes Benjamin's collecting as "unsystematic" or even "chaotic" (44), and as "directed against tradition and the authority of the past" (45).

making narrative patchworks from them. The story can be perceived as both object and experience: the thing itself and the feeling, understanding, and interpretation of it.

Benjamin connects technical advancement to myth and symbol, which are united in childhood: "every childhood binds the accomplishments of technology to the old worlds of symbol. There is nothing in the realm of nature that would be exempt from such a bond. Only, it takes form not in the aura of novelty, but in the aura of the habitual. In memory, childhood, and dream" (*Arcades* 461). There is an argument here for continuity in speculative or imaginative fiction: that the dream is not necessarily divorced from technology or that technology is not necessarily alienating and opposed to a Rousseauian state of nature or fetishized nature. The connection to the habitual indicates the world of experience, that childhood is where we are given certain tendencies that are acted out in life, and there is an opening between worlds that is relational, but also precarious. Benjamin describes how "the accelerated world of technology" ensures that "perceptual worlds … break up more rapidly" (*Arcades* 462), as the rate of change makes it more and more difficult to hold on to anything substantial.[97]

Benjamin looks to the qualities of the 19th century house as they divulge the dreamlike torpor of the bourgeois subject. He traces the "[t]hreshold magic" of bourgeois interiors (Benjamin *Arcades* 214): the magic of the liminal, the doorway, through which we enter a secluded and sheltered world. He characterizes bourgeois cities, and their interiors and furniture, as "fortifications" against the return of the feudal past or the intrusion of its casualties and remnants (*Arcades* 215). In this way, "nihilism is the innermost core of bourgeois coziness" in the construction of the household as comfortable containment, with the 19th century interior presenting itself as "a stimulus to intoxication and the dream" (Benjamin *Arcades* 216), but this is largely the intoxication of oblivion. The Victorian home formed a "shell," an encasement, which Benjamin contrasts with the "porosity and transparency" of 20th century modernism (*Arcades*

---

[97] The abstraction of financialization described by McNally is one example: the rate of change has reached the level of the incomprehensible, there is a black box where no one really knows what is going on anymore.

220).[98] But this encasement also constituted "measures taken to capture and preserve traces" (Benjamin *Arcades* 226), collections of the latent kept safe and hidden inside. The 19th century was a "dreamtime" with the consciousness of the individual subject falling "into even deeper sleep" (Benjamin *Arcades* 389). This is consistent with arguments for the autonomy of art, which can still contain revolutionary impulses even in affirmative forms: the bourgeois house and household constitute both refuge and enclosure.

The dream, if it is not the descent into oblivion, involves a "moment of waiting" (Benjamin *Arcades* 390) that at some point transitions to awakening. Sleep is therefore the first step, toward dream, from which we will eventually awaken as part of "a graduated process that goes on in the life of the individual as in the life of generations" (Benjamin *Arcades* 388). Benjamin draws a direct connection to the essential relationship of childhood to dream, as the "historical configuration" of the experience of youth in any particular generation is a "dream configuration," and each "epoch has such a side turned toward dreams, the child's side"; though he describes the modern experience of education as no longer reliant on the explanatory force of tradition and religion, leaving children to themselves "to take possession of the worlds of childhood in merely an isolated, scattered, and pathological way" (388). Fantasy's infantilization is reflective of this child's side of the dream, and in the mythic, of the desire for the explanatory power of tradition, though Le Guin does provide a logic for taking possession of childhood worlds and dreams through imagination as a faculty. This idea is consistent with Benjamin regarding the "[t]ask of childhood: to bring the new world into symbolic space. The child, in fact, can do what the grownup absolutely cannot: recognize the new once again" (*Arcades* 390), unless, as Le Guin advises, that grownup has not fully abandoned the dream of childhood, but rather embraces and develops their imaginative capacity.

Benjamin emphasizes the close relationships of dreaming, awakening, and remembrance. Referencing Bloch, he links the not-yet of the past to the idea that its "advancement has the structure of awakening," but through a process of "dialectical reversal" (Benjamin *Arcades* 389). The dialectic is between our experience of reality and

---

[98] Though as explained earlier, any idea of transparency is increasingly obscured by occult capitalism.

the dreams of the past: it "presents itself as the art of experiencing the present as waking world, a world to which that dream we name the past refers in truth. O pass through and carry out *what has been* in remembering the dream!—Therefore: remembering and awakening are most intimately related" (Benjamin *Arcades* 389). The not-yet, the past's tendencies and our recalling of them, appears in dream patterns punctuated by sleep and wakefulness, which can be transmitted to collective consciousness. Cultural elements such as architecture and fashion, or narrative and literature, already represent "what the sensoria of organs, the feeling of sickness or health, are inside the individual" (Benjamin *Arcades* 389). Benjamin, like Bloch and Tolkien, is also looking to an idea of health in culture or its lack, which appears in the inner experience. As dream configurations, these sensations or experiences of culture become naturalized "until the collective seizes upon them in politics and history emerges" (Benjamin *Arcades* 389-90). The dream configurations of the 19th century, for instance, appeared as "narcotic historicism" and as a "passion for masks" which pointed toward a real history, one grasped by surrealism (391).

The real history is that of capitalism's mystification. Capitalism is a "dream-filled sleep" that brought with it "a reactivation of mythic forces" (Benjamin *Arcades* 391), as described in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Benjamin notices that "[t]he first tremors of awakening serve to deepen sleep" (*Arcades* 391), that movement toward awakening can create a resistance, an inclination to curl back into the fogginess of illusion and the forgetfulness of sleep. But even so, "imminent awakening is poised, like the wooden horse of the Greeks, in the Troy of dreams" (Benjamin *Arcades* 392), in the dialectical process between reality and dream, real and not-real, where the dream contains latent tendencies that move toward realization, but also where experience and action prefigure new dreams. In the collective, the dream is "expression" and awakening is "interpretation" (Benjamin *Arcades* 392). The equivocality of the commodity and its "fetish character" leads to a bourgeois obliqueness that makes intoxication and fiction relevant to perception and cognition (395). Intoxication and fiction meet in the upside-downness of fantasy, combining dream and desire with alterity, reinforcing the role of imagination in thought, in how we order and make sense of our perceptions of the world,

in our interpretations but also in the perceptions themselves as part of our sensuous experience.

The experience of daydream, as an intermediate place between dream and awakening,[99] occurs in flânerie. The flâneur is Benjamin's figure of "the dreaming idler" (*Arcades* 417), a kind of "werewolf restlessly roaming a social wilderness" (418), a gothic wandering monster still influenced by natural cycles like that of the moon. Flânerie enacts "the deep human need for daydreaming" (Benjamin *Arcades* 423). The flâneur also experiences intoxication, as well as liminality in time and space where "far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment" (Benjamin *Arcades* 419). This can be a "cityscape" instead of landscape, as the city itself becomes interiorized (420-1). The cityscape, even as enclosed, is still simultaneously landscape, and its thresholds are both enclosing and conjoining (422), representing gates or doorways, respectively. Benjamin puts forward a "[f]resh air doctrine of revolutions," where the revolution opens up the city and also "disenchants" it (*Arcades* 422) by dissolving bourgeois encasement and fortification. There is an "intoxicated interpenetration of street and residence" where flânerie "has prophetic value. For the new architecture lets this interpenetration become sober reality" (Benjamin *Arcades* 423), with the recognition that the flâneur is following entangled paths of what has been and what will be.

In this context, entanglement is not entrapment but indicates these relationships between the exterior and the interior, the past and the present, and flânerie becomes a journey. The city embodies "that ancient dream of humanity, the labyrinth," which the flâneur is unknowingly trying to enter (Benjamin *Arcades* 429). And the masses themselves constitute a secondary labyrinth within the city, in whom "previously unknown chthonic traits are imprinted on the image of the city" (Benjamin *Arcades* 446), the collective unconscious or dream configuration as itself a labyrinthine underground world. The flâneur is following traces, but through daydream is also perceiving aura: "The trace is the appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it

---

[99] The distinction of daydream from dream, and the relationship of daydream to anticipatory illumination as conceptualized by Bloch, is relevant here.

113

behind may be. The aura is the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it gains possession of us" (Benjamin *Arcades* 447). In the appearance of nearness, the remnants grasped in traces have tangible qualities in a likeness or sense of what something is like; and in recognition of such, a resonance. This is what gives us the sense of gaining possession, though I would characterize it as a process of discovery and piecing together, through appearance or illusion (*Schein*) toward illumination (*Vor-Schein*). Aura's appearance of distance shows the impenetrable, that which preserves but only in the autonomous world where it can remain intact. But the distance here is not that of alienation: aura also extends a resonance, one that is immersive and immanent, a totality. In this way, fantasy also follows traces and attempts to create or recreate aura, and this process in narrative is experienced by the reader as recognition and resonance, a humming or buzzing feeling of the not-yet that is just beyond reach. Our grasp of the not-yet *feels like* something: it is already here, part of the embodied world, in our feeling of it.[100]

This dreamlike shadowing eventually encounters instrumental reason and associated ideas of progress, resulting in dissonance in the individual cast as irrationality to be expunged in culture. The "whetted axe of reason" is employed to "cultivate fields where, until now, only madness has reigned," with its handlers "looking neither right nor left so as not to succumb to the horror that beckons from deep in the primeval forest," which must be "made arable by reason" and "cleared of the undergrowth of delusion and myth" (Benjamin *Arcades* 456-7). Fantasy in its mythic forms is a defense of the primeval forest, of that which has been left fallow and uncultivated in the green country. In his analysis of myth, Benjamin puts forward the knowledge of the past in the form of the "not-yet" as what stirs "the dissolution of 'mythology' into the space of history" (*Arcades* 458), bringing it into the realm of experience. Benjamin is formulating "a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress" in favour of "actualization" (460). Reliance on the linear narrative of progress is replaced with the realization of the dreams reproduced by the collective in history.

---

[100] A phenomenological approach, beyond the current scope, would be well worth exploring here.

The past and present, as well as their potential realization in the future, are encountered as a constellation. Rather than the stable relationship of present to past, the constellation includes the dialectical relationship of "what-has-been to the now," which is "not a progression but image, suddenly emergent" that is encountered in language (Benjamin *Arcades* 462). Bloch also understands these relations as constellations in non-synchronous time, which in turn involves illumination. Constellations can be seen in the relations between narratives and even within stories as a non-synchronous communication or sharing, including recognition and remembrance. Benjamin describes the dialectical image as occurring as a "flash," denoting inspiration, which results from its "recognizability" in the moment: there is a recovery that occurs here, but after the flash has been "irretrievably lost" (*Arcades* 473). These flashes are therefore also messages or signals, products of "the prophetic gaze that catches fire from the summits of the past" (Benjamin *Arcades* 473).

The dialectic of awakening is that of dream and waking, and within this construct, the historian is the dream interpreter (Benjamin *Arcades* 464) of a history that envelops a "constellation of dangers" (470). History is neither "homogenous" nor "continuous" (470) but is a "form of remembrance" (471), often the remembrance of horror. The "tradition that is catastrophe" is where history and culture coalesce (Benjamin *Arcades* 473). The prevailing ideas of progress are "grounded in catastrophe. That things are 'status quo' *is* the catastrophe" (473). The epic—myth—is seen as that which constructs "continuity" and "homogeneity" which must be forsaken or shattered and instead stitched together "with ruins—that is, with the present" (Benjamin *Arcades* 474). We trace constellations to help us navigate a catastrophic and perilous past that extends into both present and future and assemble the now from the fragments we find.

This is what art does: it progresses by creating new methods and forms (Benjamin *Arcades* 474). There is an opening before catastrophe, a "critical moment" where change is possible: "Catastrophe—to have missed the opportunity. Critical moment—the status quo threatens to be preserved. Progress—the first revolutionary measure taken" (474). Progress as revolutionary movement is redemptive, and provides happiness for us in the moment, rather than sacrifice for the future (479). In its expressions and interpretations,

fantasy encounters and responds to these critical moments, either preserving the status quo or progressing toward awakening and actualization.

4.3.   Art as Lived Experience: The Paris Commune

Following the explanation through Benjamin of fantasy as awakening, we can see that fantasy is a repository of a kind of unconscious. The ground of fantasy is not solely of the world as it can be imagined, but of the real possibilities for differences in social relations that have existed and have been fought for, and though this history has been lost or obscured, we retain a sense of it. The revolutionary measures of the past chip away at enclosures, creating space for the possibility of disalienation and re-enchantment embodied in experience. A critical moment can be observed in the modern romantic in relation to the Paris Commune. We can therefore examine the Paris Commune as a revolutionary measure and any traces it may have left for fantasy.

In her historical analysis of the Paris Commune in *Communal Luxury*, Kristen Ross emphasizes the "Communal imagination" in the Commune as integral to understanding its emergence and ongoing influence (5), which becomes relevant to fantasy.[101] This imagination is shaped by the attempt itself, where "[a]ctions produce dreams and ideas, and not the reverse" (7). Dreams have a history: we do not definitively start with the idea and then try to concretize it; the flow can move in other directions, we can start with something that has happened, then turn it to dream. We look to the past, to the latent and anticipatory, because the future is already present in what has been and what is. Explained by Bloch and then by Benjamin, the material object or event "bears the traces of its moment—or better, it views itself as *still a part of* the actual building of that moment, and so it is a rough-hewn, constructive kind of thought" (Ross 7). These traces are "the evidence of an unseen world," or a "system of rapid exchanges, intersections, and collaborations, of symbolic forms of solidarity and scattered, often

---

[101] Monleón points to the Paris Commune as the turning point for the influence of the nonrational in the avant-garde, with the Commune representing the development of the imaginative "projections" of previous revolutions (84).

116

ephemeral encounters," which are "momentary" but also constitute "a momentum" (Ross 8).[102]

This has the sense of a constellation, but not one that is static: in the movement of the night sky, what we think of as immortal and untouchable is in constant motion and flux, and small actions and interactions all contribute to larger patterns and currents. The Commune, materialized and experienced, "was a working laboratory of political inventions, improvised on the spot or hobbled together out of past scenarios and phrases, reconfigured as need be" (Ross 11). The Commune emerged as a patchwork of the past and the imagined or desired, with future-bearing qualities and the flexibility to be adapted and reconfigured. Its realization of utopian impulses, even if short-lived, speaks to "the experience of time under the Commune and its relation to the social, a relation that has everything to do with forms of historical memory taking on new shapes and figures or mobilizing old shapes and figures in a new context" (Ross 13). It was therefore the result of awakening, of remembrance and dream actualized as event and as worldview: "The Commune was both rallying cry and the thing itself" (Ross 20).

The reconfigurations of the Commune included attempts to bridge art and life. Its communal luxury encompassed the "project of making art *lived*—not superfluous or trivial, but vital and indispensable to the community" (Ross 59). The relation to art is not simply of its embodiment, of the experience of art, but of communities themselves as artistic endeavours, which requires a way of being in the world that is inconsistent with capitalist modernity's instrumentalization. To further articulate some of the ideas of an aesthetic everydayness that were circulating at the time of, and in response to, the Commune, Ross references William Morris, who she says crafted "a new space/time of seasonal rhythms and luxurious bounty" and a future "that hearken[ed] back to the chronotype of a society of simple reproduction and the cyclical nature of its processes, whose rhythms come from nature" (61). Capitalism's devaluation of art and craft has effects on "the possibility of fellowship, creativity, and human happiness" (Ross 62). The

---

[102] Ross briefly mentions the influence of Benjamin in the idea that "there are moments when a particular event or struggle enters vividly into the figurability of the present" (2), with the Commune being one example.

117

aesthetic dimension enables "a transformed and sensuous relationship" to objects and labour, and then "the remaking, in turn, of one's own capacities" (Ross 64).

Morris' world was that of the green country, of cyclical renewal, as in Bakhtin's carnival, and of rhythmic flow in both art and work, as with Benjamin's storytelling.[103] This includes the idea of "thinking together" urban and rural expressions of communality, "the insurrectionary Commune with the woodland commons" (Ross 94), where the wandering forest meets the city, both providing fertile ground for utopian and revolutionary thought and action. For Morris, this was the appeal of life on a different scale, an emphasis on the everyday, where happiness comes from art in the commonplace, from its embodiment (Ross 113-4), and "[b]eing attentive to the energies of the outmoded was one way to think oneself into the future" (116). The inclusion of the rural does not exist in contradiction to modernism: Gifford observes that there is a rural modernism, not just an urban one, though it can be overlooked in theory and criticism[104]; likewise, the "rural fantastic" has a place "in literary modernism as [an] important produc[t] of the modernist moment" (*Modernist* 48).

The intertwining of the rural and the urban, the past and the present in an aesthetic understanding of being in active relationships with our environments has important implications for our current capacities to imagine worlds. These worlds can be recognized as extending beyond human interests. Ross sees communal luxury as comprising a "milieu" that is "co-produced by humans and nature" (137) where our notions of space drive "a confrontation with—or accommodation to—the non-human world" (136). She proposes that we should be focused on the "dialectic of dependencies and reciprocities" in which we are all in relationship with the land as commons (137). This vision of the commons is not simply of shared places that are inhabited and utilized by humanity, but of the living ground of the world that supports the interconnected web of life.

---

[103] It is important to recall Morris as a significant figure in the development of fantasy as genre in his role as an author of high fantasy consistent with the mythic orientation, including his invention of the secondary world as part of the form, as mentioned in a previous footnote. Morris' aesthetics were woven into his creation of fantastical worlds, and vice versa.

[104] Gifford refers to Hemingway and Faulkner as expressing a rural modernism in literary fiction.

The Commune, though it did not last, exists as an ongoing reference point, as a beacon on a mountain that continually relights flames. Ross notes Marx as commenting on the Commune as a social form "creating ways of framing or reading or taking part in the moment of its intervention that then alter the frame of perception and open up the field of the possible" (77). The Commune therefore represents a concrete lived experience, not just an historical event, an example of the "dialectic of lived and conceived" (Ross 93) where its very existence, urged into being by the unrealized desires and resistance of the past that were then materialized, entering the world of experience, allowed it to become part of history, to be carried forward as awakened dream and as a resonant locus for future thought and action. We will see that resonance in Miéville's work, to which I now turn.

Chapter 5.

Entering Miéville's Contemporary Fantastic Worlds

In this chapter, I present a close reading of China Miéville's contemporary fantasies. In keeping with the critical focus of the thesis, I outline processes of rupture, reconnection, and reconfiguration within Miéville's novels, with themes of latent potentialities and dreams, memory and visibility, possibility and remaking, choice and action, manifestation and actualization. Though Miéville's oeuvre corresponds most strongly to the gothic orientation of fantasy, his works can be analyzed as generally representative of the variations of romanticism shown in this thesis. The Bas-Lag series, including *Perdido Street Station*, *The Scar*, and *Iron Council*, is set in the same secondary world of Bas-Lag, aware of and reflecting gothic characterizations of alienation and monstrosity. *Un Lun Dun* incorporates mythic elements of fairy tale and other fantastic works while poking fun at some of the tropes of high fantasy. *The Last Days of New Paris* immerses the reader in an urban surreal world, illustrating how reconfiguration is a hallmark of fantasy in the relation of art and its embodied manifestations.

5.1. From the Impossible to the Possible: The Bas-Lag Series

In the Bas-Lag series, Miéville relies heavily on the uncanny and the grotesque stylistically. He is inventively portraying the successful transition to bourgeois control, to a capitalist industrial society along with the technological and ideological revolutions that made that transition possible, and correspondingly the roots of resistance within. The plot of *Iron Council* is based overtly on socialist revolutionary movements, and when reading, it is difficult not to draw direct comparisons to the Paris Commune; the Commune is even more of a thread in *The Last Days of New Paris*. After experiencing several centuries of ongoing and often failed resistance to capitalism, combined with its increasing scope and obscuration, we are less sure about how to create change. Miéville does not give us answers—he has made it clear that he is not in the business of creating utopian models. But, to reiterate his own words, he does give us something "good to think with."

The series, intentionally or unintentionally, reflects Miéville's own logic of the not-real, moving from the impossible to the possible: from dream (*Perdido Street Station*) to potential (*The Scar*) to action (*Iron Council*). Its structure parallels the process of critical awakening, of bringing knowledge that is concealed first to the edges of conceivability, then to contemplation, and finally to the path of transformation. *Perdido Street Station* investigates dreams and how they become nightmares, comprising a fantastic exploration of the unconscious, the latent. *The Scar* unfolds potentialities, those in consciousness and understanding, recognizing that exploration can easily become colonization and exploitation. *Iron Council* moves toward action and remaking, bringing the revolutionary and transformative attempt into social being and history.

This presents the reader with a kind of formula for world creation, or re-creation. It consists of a playing out of the consequences of ideas. We are part of specific histories, we are rooted in them, and yet we do not see their consequences clearly, we do not see how the hidden shapes our present, our now, and thus in turn shapes our future. What has history left us, and what do we gain by looking at it with imaginative eyes? Thus, fantasy brings history into story, to pick up the threads of what was left and make them alive again in our consciousness, and ultimately in our attempts at remaking the present. This is not direct or explicit, nor is it a simple matter of inspiring hope. We begin with the not-real and must decide what we want to make real; or alternatively, we begin with the real, and try to see its truth and potential clearly through the not-real. We need the expansiveness of the impossible in order to redefine the possible, and to move the not-yet possible into the realm of the possible.

5.2.   The Latent and the Dream in *Perdido Street Station*

The monstrous consumption of dreams is the subject of *Perdido Street Station*, where the fictional city of New Crobuzon is beset by a group of horrific slake-moths from the Fractured Land, who feed on dreams and leave their victims in mindless coma-like states. The parallel to capitalist modernity and its monstrous reality is direct. Modernity feels like a dream that has gone bad. Even those able to fulfil the aspirations of modernity discover an emptiness that resists being satisfied. Modernity is devouring our dreams and

perverting them. The slake-moths ingest "'the peculiar brew that results from self-reflexive thought, when the instincts and needs and desires and intuitions are folded in on themselves and we reflect on our thoughts and then reflect on the reflection, endlessly…'" (Miéville *Perdido* 326).

The moths are performing vampiric acts of Marcusean repressive desublimation, extracting our dreams and desires for their own gratification. They are emptying us of our creative and productive capacities, of our life energies, including our potentiality: it is consumption applied to consciousness itself. We are consumed and zombified by capitalism, body and spirit: our dreams are used up so totally that we become husks, and this is done not simply for subsistence, but for entertainment (Miéville *Perdido* 329). Furthermore, the moths then defecate the substance of nightmare over the city, grooming their victims with preternatural fear. They quite literally fertilize the dreams of the city with invisible excrement (326). For many of us, this is an image that reflects our reality: capitalist modernity as a waking nightmare, a mundane reality of wading through shit so pervasive that we cannot even see it.

The protected subjectivity of our own minds is no longer inviolable. The moths live multidimensionally, on many planes of existence (Miéville *Perdido* 329), so they become impossible to fight: there is nothing to target because the target is always changing. This is a fantastic embodiment of total administration, of the reach of late capitalism beyond the traditional confines of labour and driven into the culture industry to extract every last bit of usable and consumable energy from us. There is no sphere left untouched, no aspect of life or consciousness that cannot be subjected to domination. Capitalism sustains itself on our dreams. The advancement of technology makes our productive capacities as workers less and less relevant, rather than freeing us as it would and should under Marxist principles. The insatiable monster has turned from our bodies to our dreams, and feeds deeply on our creative capacities, feeds on them while simultaneously making us complacent and passive. Our future thus depends on who has control of the collective dream, on who has control of the imaginary.

Miéville uses the character of the Weaver—a giant, interdimensional spider who speaks only in poetry—as a figure of the aesthetic. The Weaver's grotesque recombinations serve the purpose of enhancing the "worldweave," which could include anything from fashioning a stone floor into a statue, to dismembering people for their parts in order to "shape the pattern in the aether that only it could see" (Miéville *Perdido* 289). The Weaver lives for beauty, even savage beauty, and those who steal dreams steal beauty, removing threads from the pattern of the world (341-9). The moths unweave the tapestries of human experience. Miéville also introduces a form of artificial intelligence: constructs, robots which eventually form a hive mind called The Council (*Perdido* 415-6). The moths cannot feed on them because AI does not dream, but rather has a mind of "excessive logic" (416); the moths cannot be fully destroyed by the constructs either due to the moths' ability to move between dimensions.

There is a complex role here for reason and rationality, regarding the work of reason in conceptualizing resistance. The dream makes us vulnerable, but it is also what needs to be saved. What works in terms of resistance in *Perdido* is a combination of reason and the aesthetic. The moths are attracted to but cannot sustain themselves on the thoughts, consciousness, and dreams of the Weaver, since the Weaver has no recognizable distinctions between modes of thought, and no ego to settle upon: the Weaver is nonrational (Miéville *Perdido* 551-2). The Council's AI mind has no subconscious, no emotions, and is ruthlessly rational; its mechanical mind provides no fuel, comprised only of "empty thought-calories inconceivable as nutrition" (552). The human mind is a dialectic of the conscious, the rational, and the subconscious, the irrational: it depends on the interaction among different states (553). These states are combined to defeat the moths, understood as a totality: "[w]hat was arithmetically discernible as rationalism *plus* dreams was really a *whole*, whose constituent parts could not be disentangled" (554). We require a new kind of reason, one capable of navigating and harnessing the rational mind and the imagination, in order to effectively resist the all-encompassing domination of capitalist modernity.

There is an additional storyline that is relevant to discussions of the premodern and the importance of experience in informing reason. In the novel, the premodern is seen

in the society of the Garuda, a culture of large avian hunter-gatherers. The Garuda perceive community as conceptually concrete and see individuality as conceptually abstract. This relates to the only crime in their society, that of choice-theft, which is: "'[t]o take the choice of another … to forget their concrete reality, to abstract them, to forget that you are a node in a matrix, that actions have consequences. We must not take the choice of another being. What is community but a means to … for all we individuals to have … our choices'" (Miéville *Perdido* 607). Rape is the choice-theft that occurs in the plot, an outwardly physical violation, but all invasions and exploitations, all assaults and coercions and dominations are choice-thefts: they fragment the whole, they fragment one's wholeness of being. This can be true of an individual or a culture.

From the perspective of the Garuda, it is the relationship to community that ensures that individuals are respected, and it is egoism that robs others of freedom. This becomes apparent in one of the Garuda's assessments of New Crobuzon: "'Your city institutions … Talking and talking of individuals … but crushing them in layers and hierarchies … until their choices might be between three kinds of squalor'" (Miéville *Perdido* 608). The choices provided within the official life of the city are those that occur only within a narrow horizon. The limited rationality of the New Crobuzoners does not admit other kinds of knowledge, does not situate choice within the concrete context of the social totality, of experience. It thus constitutes choice-theft, the theft of alternatives, the theft of potentiality. It is in this way that "choice-thefts steal from the future as well as the present" (Miéville *Perdido* 608). Choice-theft steals possible futures, possible worlds. The hegemony of technocratic rationalization is choice-theft.

5.3. Mining Possibility: Fractured Potentialities and Anticipations in *The Scar*

These possible worlds are opened up in *The Scar.* The novel depicts a floating city, Armada, that has been created through a reutilization of the existing materials, resources, and even people found at the margins of society: it is a repurposing of the remnants and castoffs of society (Miéville *Scar* 82). It is a haven for the Remade, prisoner-slaves who have been genetically altered into monstrous configurations as forms

124

of exploitation and punishment. Some Armada inhabitants are press-ganged, including the main character, Bellis, who struggles with her own sense of helplessness and longing for escape, even when escape seems impossible. It is the helplessness of knowledge uncoupled from action, which in many ways seems to be the malady of our time. *The Scar* deals with themes of exploration become exploitation, of colonial expansion and the domination of nature, which ultimately extends to possibility itself.

There is a wound in the world, a scar, that was made when a people called the Ghosthead crashed into and cracked open the world. They unleashed powers which they learned to harness and manipulate through a process of "possibility mining":

> "… They had *scarred*, they had *broken* the world. And, in doing so, they set free forces that they were able to tap. Forces that allowed them to reshape things, to fail and succeed *simultaneously*—because they mined for possibilities. A cataclysm like that, shattering a world, the rupture left behind: it opens up a rich seam of potentialities.
>
> "And they knew how to pick at the might-have-beens and pull out the best of them, use them to shape the world …" (Miéville *Scar* 393-4)

As an analogy for modernity, this would be the world-breaking that has come about through what I have referred to as the dispossession, rationalization, and industrialization that pervades and begets the destruction of worlds. We have broken open the whole world, and in many ways have devastated it by doing so. But we have also made discoveries and created technologies that are beyond what was imaginable in the premodern, and this has only happened because old restrictions and limitations were transcended. When approaching these potentialities, the fantasy world of *The Scar* prompts us to ask ourselves certain questions. What can we conscientiously use to reshape our world? What is dangerous? What has the potential to lead us on a new path— what contains the capacity for a different way of life? What will doom us?

This fantastic vision applies not just to technologies but to conceptions of reality. The choices we make determine what comes into being and what does not: we shape the real in relationship to the not-real, as articulated by Miéville. This is true in relation to the present but also in relation to the past, to the alternate realities that did not materialize, to the not-yet, as illustrated in possibility mining: "'the Ghosthead knew how to tap some of

125

those that might have been. To give them a kind of life. To use them, to push them into the reality that in its very existence denied theirs, which is *defined* by what happened and by the denial of what did not. Tapped by possibility machines, outcomes that didn't quite make it to actuality were boosted, and made real'" (Miéville *Scar* 394). *The Scar* can be interpreted as tapping the idea that the past and the present contain a multitude of possibilities that can be developed into viable alternatives. These alternatives are accessible and available to us through fantasy.

Of course, in the context of the characteristics of the critical nature of fantasy assembled in this thesis, this is a decidedly utopian interpretation, one that Miéville does not evoke. His outlook is nuanced, not hopeful. Armada's voyage to the Scar ends in mutiny. The Scar is death, it is obliteration—or at least, that is its most likely outcome. It is "'[a] crack, that's all. A crack in the world'" (Miéville *Scar* 549). The small group that chooses to continue on to the Scar is imagined as made up of fugitive "[r]omantics, storytellers, misfits, the suicidal and the mad" (563), in a way that is almost wistful; an acknowledgment of the history of tremendous lost potential in the world, potential that few will ever even try to access, but the reality is that most of our potential is turned to the purposes of domination and destruction. We know this, and our choices to try to reform what we already have thus make sense but are nonetheless disappointing. After mutiny, the novel ends with bourgeois restoration: "*We're heading back for waters way back the way we came. We're going back to how things were*" (Miéville *Scar* 567). The waters of potential are deep and terrifying, and may not give us the escape or empowerment we desire.

5.4.   The Critical Moment: Action and Remaking in *Iron Council*

Escape and revolutionary actualization are attempted in *Iron Council*, with a central idea of remaking. The story begins with a small band of people escaping New Crobuzon in search of the Iron Council: "they were looking for friends, for a myth, for something missing, for something they had to save, that would one day save them, for the Iron Council" (Miéville *Iron* 122). Looking for what had been lost. We discover that the Iron Council is a rebel train, commandeered from its capitalist masters through

126

insurrectionist action and then transformed into a mobile collective in exile. The taking of the train "is a Remaking" (Miéville *Iron* 251), a remaking wrought in no small part by the Remade.

The Iron Council must flee past a bizarre area called the cacotopic stain to survive. This is significant, since it is a place of monsters and madness, a place others will not go: it is where the rules do not apply. The cacotopic stain is unreason: and these places of unreason are central to all three books in the Bas-Lag series, as places of both horror and hope. The Council must live on in the margins, the liminal periphery, where they have been exiled but where greater freedoms and possibilities can exist. The Council itself is thus also a "Remaking" (Miéville *Iron* 459). The golemist Judah becomes the Council's bard or storyteller, returning to New Crobuzon to spread news of the Council, of "[t]he truth, escape, a new life, a rolling democracy, Remade arcadia. —I'll make you legend, he says and the birds listen,—and it will be true" (295). And the Council does fade into legend, but a time comes when it must be rediscovered, when it must be found. For New Crobuzon will not permit it to exist, even in exile.

There are seams of struggle in *Iron Council*, of wars and revolutions, of threats visible and invisible. There is a war between the rival powers of New Crobuzon and Tesh, as well as discontent and resistance within New Crobuzon against its authorities. The route to the Council is found with the help of a hidden monk from Tesh, whose abilities permit him to discover that which is hidden, but at the cost of losing other important knowledge, memories and skills, bits of self: "[t]he monk was displaced, renegade, renounced by history and home. *You want to disappear. Every last route you uncover, you lose something—something's hidden from you*" (Miéville *Iron* 144). Every choice, every path has its cost. As with possibility mining in *The Scar*, the realization of one reality necessitates the denial of others. It is also the hidden monk who ends the war with Tesh, unbeknownst to all but a handful of people. The monk is aware of hidden dangers we do not perceive directly, but which can be much more threatening than those things to which we give our attention or are distracted by: that which is not visible, patterns made of invisible threads that we cannot trace but that nonetheless will destroy us. The appearance, that which is visible, does not reflect the underlying truth of what is

127

happening. In modernity, it is difficult to identify what the real dangers are. We play politics, we bicker, all while headed directly toward civilization-ending catastrophes. Some see it happening. Many do not, even if at this point willful ignorance is required.

At the same time as the war with Tesh is surreptitiously put to an end, the citizens of New Crobuzon are in the midst of the defeat of their revolutionary struggle. Radical factions had come together to resist the government and had set up an armed Collective of their own. The Iron Council, in turn, is pursued by New Crobuzon militia, and decides to return to the city to give the revolutionary Collective hope. But the Collective has been beaten before the Council gets there. It is faced with the choice of death in exile or death in combat. The question is then: what do you do when you must fight a fight you already know cannot be won? When you have already lost?

The Iron Council decides to keep going to the city: "*[i]f they tried to argue it, they'd lose … but even though they know that, they still go on … because in going against the facts, they change them*" (Miéville *Iron* 514). They hope for an impossible outcome, aspiring to change the boundaries of the possible. It is Judah who intervenes, freezing the Iron Council in time with a time golem (Miéville *Iron* 541-2). They are saved but removed from the world and the ability to act in the world, fixed in a Benjaminian moment of waiting: suspended at the cusp of the critical moment of return to the status quo or progression toward actualization. The Council's leader, Ann-Hari, rails against Judah's intervention: "'…You don't get to choose. You don't get to decide when is the right time, when it fits your story. *This was the time we were here*. We knew. We decided. And you don't know, and now we don't either, we'll never know what would have happened. You stole all those people from themselves'" (Miéville *Iron* 552). Action is a cure for hopelessness. There is no right time to try to change things. This is the time we are here. We cannot predict all outcomes, and we cannot assume that our attempts to resist are meaningless.

Once again, after the revolution, there is restoration of authority, and the opening up provided by the resistance—in this case, the train's route—is used for expansion of the status quo, for further exploitation and domination (Miéville *Iron* 555). This is the result

we have come to expect. But the spirit of revolution does not fully dissipate, it leaves traces. The revolutionary publication *Runagate Rampant* continues its secret operation, issuing the following pamphlet:

> "Order reigns in New Crobuzon!" You stupid lackeys. Your order is built on sand. Tomorrow the Iron Council will move on again, and to your horror it will proclaim with its whistle blaring: *We say: We were, we are, we will be*. (Miéville *Iron* 561)

The immobilized Iron Council becomes a site of pilgrimage, a "moment become a place" (562). People visit and revisit both place and time, connecting to the daring of radical action, the freedom of escape, the unity of unalienated community. The Iron Council is silent, yet their living statues have one message, one mission: "*They are always coming*" (Miéville *Iron* 564). The potential of revolution waits for us, in history yet out of time. Poised at the moment of awakening, it waits for remaking.

5.5. Mythic Tropes and Magical Choice in the Cataphany of *Un Lun Dun*

Before remaking, however, we can look to how we have been made in the first place—and how we are making others—in childhood and in the wondrous knowledge we pass on. One example of Miéville's work that does seem to make use of mythic storytelling is *Un Lun Dun*, fittingly a children's or young adult (YA) fantasy. It is a quest story involving a journey to the alternate world of UnLondon; a cataphany. It shares obvious similarities with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz*, which both have roots in fairy tale and prefigure the surreal. The quest is appointed to Zanna, the prophetic Shwazzy or chosen one.[105] Accompanied by her friend Deeba, they track an animate but broken umbrella, or unbrella, to an upside-down world[106] in search of a menacing shadow that has been pursuing Zanna. They follow the traces of the unseen, the signals left behind, to find a wheel that turns off the city (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 23), a

---

[105] From the French "choisi."

[106] Zanna is a "dreamy" blonde girl (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 4) following a creature to an alternate, fantastical world, like Alice. Deeba is a more practical sort who just wants to go home, like Dorothy, and adopts a milk carton Toto named Curdle (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 122).

wheel of time and life spinning the nature of reality askew, opening to the alternate world that critical fantasy employs.

Their entry to another reality makes them abnauts, able to cross up, down, or sideways to alternate or abworlds (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 53). They discover UnLondon, which is made from moil, objects that are "Mildly Obsolete in London" (57) such as the umbrella they followed, the scraps and debris of modernity come to life, uncanny manifestations of lost time. These remnants of the recent and not so recent past seep into abcities, but "[i]deas seep both ways" (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 64): the ab- is also a source of light, wonder, magic, and dream, and in this way cities and abcities dream each other (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 99). The UnSun contains a hole, and it is said that the part taken from this alternate dream sun is our own sun, and therefore "what lights your days got plucked out of what lights ours" (64). The world is illuminated by the bits of dream that find their way into experience and actualization. Abcities also collect obsolete people, such as the conductor from London, their guide to the Pons Absconditus, a moving bridge whose purpose is to link one place to another but is always out of reach (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 89). It is possible to make connections, but there is no clear roadmap for doing so, and our way is obscured, indeterminate.

The enemy that has engaged the girls turns out to be malicious, animate Smog, generated from decades of pollution that has itself seeped into the abcity. The magical weapon prophesized to be wielded by the Shwazzy, the Klinneract, is a misapprehension of a Clean Air Act put forward in London, turned into legend in UnLondon (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 156-7). The prophecies are wrong and the chosen one is not chosen but is incapacitated (145). It is left to Deeba to take up the quest as the "'Unchosen One,'" because "'where's the skill in being a hero if you were always destined to do it?'" (459). Miéville is turning the tropes of heroic fantasy upside down, reminding the reader to take a critical view. It is not the apparent influence of magic that is most essential, but choice. Magic is not what we think it is: not a natural force to be manipulated or controlled, but a collection of ideas and actions that result in series of choices, and we therefore have a degree of agency in determining outcomes.

Language is a primary vehicle through which magic is created, in story. Miéville makes particular use of this magic in *Un Lun Dun*, and of fantasy as a game, by playing with language, particularly with naming. Having returned to London after Zanna's injury, Deeba finds her way back to UnLondon by climbing the bookshelves of her school's library. As "booksteps" and "storyladders" (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 163) they are a means of entering the abworld like in the fairy tale of Jack and the Beanstalk, vines and roots intertwining with shelf and page (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 168) in an interpenetration, or intergrowth, of story into story. The "vertical tunnel" that Deeba ascends is only the "tip of a shaft of books that went deep into the earth" (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 171), inclining, as do all bookshelves, toward the Wordhoard Pit, containing "everything ever written or lost" (175). This underworld of collected story is mirrored in Wraithtown, where the buildings themselves are also ghosts, architectural constellations "clouded with their own remembered selves" (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 189), with ethereal, diffuse layers of the past, of history, made visible (191). The underworld of the dead, in UnLondon, continues in the silhouettes of spectral remembrances.

It is through the consumption of both people and story that the Smog gains and expands its power. The Smog gains knowledge by destroying, by burning a book or a body and breathing the resulting smoke into itself (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 226-7) in the brutal reductionism of the furnace. It is resisted through a rebellion of disobedient embodied words, and we are reminded that words do not always do what was wanted or intended, because it is not only the individual speaker who determines meaning (Miéville *Un Lun Dun* 267-8).[107] The broken umbrellas, under the control of the Smog, are repaired, rebrellas with renewed purpose and capacities to defy and struggle against their master (425-6). But the Smog is ultimately defeated by nothing, by being removed from existence (448). Though we are not in fantasy's green country, Miéville's urban fantastic asks us to consider that urban environments, even if poisoned and damaged from decades

---

[107] As steps of the quest itself are skipped over in the novel in the interest of expediency, it occurred to me that the quest is a technique designed to keep the reader interested and engaged in the story, and this involvement makes the reader a kind of co-creator. In this I am reminded of Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*.

if not centuries of degradation, can provide opportunities for reconnection, and that it is our responsibility to recuperate and care for cities too.

5.6. Surrealist Art and Manifestation in *The Last Days of New Paris*

Fantasy is therefore at home in urban worlds, and the city itself as alternate reality is considered in *The Last Days of New Paris*, where Miéville imagines how it might be for surrealist art to quite literally become animated and embodied. The form of the novella plays with the boundaries of the real and not-real, being presented in the afterword as a secret personal account divulged to Miéville in an interview, pointing to a permeability of life and story. The story told is that of a co-existing alternate Paris still at war with Nazis and filled with "manifs," creatures that are living manifestations of surrealist art created through something simply called the S-Blast, grotesque objects inhabiting the collective dream and nightmare of the city (Miéville *Last Days* 13). The explosiveness of surrealism is represented in the idea of the S-Blast, and the manifs also show Benjamin's "intoxicated interpenetration," living art as objects of private interiors coming to life in the street, the exterior, as revolutionary subjects. The houses of the city in revolt are "tiny communes … House-villages" (Miéville *Last Days* 32), a constellation of communes, and the city itself makes up an entire world (55), but one that is ending.

The surrealist version of Paris related by Miéville, though chaotic, is made up of projections and constellations. The main character, Thibaut, is a resistance fighter who is taught to channel *disponibilité*, tapping objective chance, and is able to do so due to the fact that following the S-blast, "all Parisians grew invisible organs that flex in the presence of the marvelous" (Miéville *Last Days* 22). He is asked to be not only a fighter but a collector, a militant flâneur picking through ruins and following traces on the map of a "constellated Paris" looking for "lost objects" (Miéville *Last Days* 70). The Nazis view the manifs as a contamination and move to contain the corporeal art; they cannot use or replicate the manifs, and conjure devils and demons from Hell to kill the art (16-9). While sensing and wherever possible working with the manifs, the resistance fighters need to exorcise the devils—aided by allied clergy as "unlikely" resistors, in contrast to

the more plentiful Catholic collaborators—in some cases taking pleasure in using the "relics of wizardry that had embarrassed the Enlightenment," and in others loathing the "clericalism" and ritualism required (Miéville *Last Days* 24). The Nazis are eventually able to fashion demon-like manifs, not living or sentient art but rather images (24), illusion, *Schein*, the appearance of manifs, but are working toward creating their own true manifs, manifestations of their dreams and desires.

It is made clear that it is not only the radical energies of the surrealists that were released in the S-Blast and had become embodied in manifs. The explosion also brought into being "figures from Symbolism and Decadence, imaginings of the Surrealists' ancestors and beloveds, ghosts from their proto-canon" (Miéville *Last Days* 31). The forests on the outskirts of the city are dangerous, as "forests mingle with legendary creatures hidden in the thickets" (51), mythic terrors to be avoided. Miéville draws a direct line from magical and occult histories to surrealism, but also emphasizes that surrealism constitutes an attempt to reveal mystification. Arguing against a claim of the "'veritable occultation of Surrealism'" in Breton's *Second Manifesto*, Thibaut points out that Breton's search for the Philosopher's Stone came with the intent "'to lose it again'" (Miéville *Last Days* 60). The vision is to use magical and mythical forces for the purposes of illumination and awakening, and to actively oppose the incursion of fascist myth.

In Breton, we encounter once again the idea of magic as exercising power. The origins of the S-Blast are located in Marseilles a decade earlier, at a surrealist gathering hosted by Breton. Jack Parsons, an American rocket scientist trained in the occult by Aleister Crowley, is working on a machine to help him exploit the "transmogrifying power" of magic around him, using an "arithmetic of invocation, an algebra of ritual" (Miéville *Last Days* 90) and looking to the surrealists for clues as they were "faithful to revolt and objective chance" (85). But Parsons is not looking for the revolutionary dialectic of poetry and reality sought in surrealism, he is looking for mastery. He plays a game of exquisite corpse[108] with the surrealists to exploit for his own ends, and uses not

---

[108] Exquisite corpse is a surrealist game where a paper is folded and each person contributes a section of drawing or a line of poetry without seeing the whole.

only their drawings, but the embedded histories and knowledge on which they draw, unconscious connected lines of "Marx and Freud and coincidence, the revolution of cities, liberation, and the random," the "dreams and images" of art as reflected in threads of influence and inspiration (Miéville *Last Days* 117); and thus "heroes of the past breathed dead breath into the machine" (118), collected to energize its battery. His formula is one of magic + surrealism + violence, creating a weapon that ruptures the world through a concentration of the life-force and history of art (Miéville *Last Days* 138), a catastrophic explosion leaving ruins imprinted with memory and trauma.

We see once again how those who would gain power for the purposes of domination use our dreams to fulfil their nightmares, and how realized or enacted dreams can sour. The Nazis and their religious collaborators construct a demon who can kill manifs, relying on the logic of sacrifice: the sacrifice and consumption of manifs—the consumption of art—feeds it (Miéville *Last Days* 155). This demon itself is then sacrificed to create a Nazi manif: a kitsch self-portrait of Hitler used to strip Paris of substance, refashioning the city according to the "simpering" and "cloying imaginary" (162) of the dream and myths of fascism as simplified perfection, an emptying of complexity and messy life. The Hitler manif is stopped by the head of a dismembered exquisite corpse manif, who obstructs the Hitler manif's "unembellishing gaze" (Miéville *Last Days* 165) and, through an "unfolding" or "shuffling of presence," reconfigures the Hitler manif as an exquisite corpse (166). And with this transformation, Paris too is unperfected, relined with "cracks" and "ruination," once again "scarred with the stuff of history" (Miéville *Last Days* 166).

Thibaut takes on a new mission to "*redo history*," secreting the records and evidence of New Paris' strangeness to the barricade that keeps it a separate reality (Miéville *Last Days* 168), its boundary or threshold. But the story of the surreal alternate world, the memory of its existence, is shared in the interview with Miéville in the hope that "some understanding of the nature of the manifs of New Paris, of the source and power of art and manifestation, may be of some help to us, in times to come" (Miéville *Last Days* 182).

There is still a need for the refuge created by art, and fantasy can and should persist in providing both pleasure and refuge, as well as being something "good to think with," an indicator of desire and potentiality, and a rupturing of capitalism's stranglehold on life. The hope is also for concrete manifestations, reconnections to the sensuous and re-enchantment of the mundane, a reconfiguration of the possible, a way to make the world livable by making art lived.

So I will ask again. What is imaginable? What is possible?

Epilogue:

Renewal (The Radical Poetic)

At the end of things, we go back to the beginning, to the ground. It is here that we find the radical poetic, in creating from the root. This is how I propose we interpret the *radical* in radical fantasy: as creation from the root, understanding how the imagination is grounded in history, turning down to an underworld of bones and ruins and memory, and up toward what is bright and illuminated, awakening to growth and renewal. The explorations in this thesis have led me toward the idea of an ecosystem of fantasy, its roots, interconnections, and entanglements, what it is feeding and growing. The forms are not fixed, but its ideas are seeds that adapt, change, hybridize. And as science fiction and fantasy are not at odds but on a continuum of imagining variegations of possibility, with considerable overlap and cross-fertilization, so too can the sensuous, embodied world and the imagined, abstract world meet in complementary ways that enrich life and enhance its flourishing.

This thesis contains its own utopian not-yet, pointing backward and forward in constellated patterns, reaching out in lines that wait to be traced and followed. There are theorists I would point to as offering productive material for the ground of fantasy, including, but by no means limited to, Tim Ingold, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Donna Haraway. These theorists are working with ideas of presence and resurgence as these relate to creative and generative ecologies. This offers a broadened possibility for re-envisioning ideas of illumination, awakening, experience, embodiment, and refuge in radical fantasy. Presence allows for a form of embodying the imaginary as being-with, as felt and experienced. Imaginative thought is a way in which we come into presence—which includes coming into the present, the now—connecting us non-synchronously to pasts and futures in a resonant flow, which may include joy but also suffering in empathic connections and remembrances.

Fantasy's impossibilities and strange configurations cannot really be embodied but can evoke presence. Ingold sees presence as an alternative to contextualization (*One*

World 169), with life as movement, pattern, tuning, unfolding (*Ground* 332). For Simpson, rootedness is radical embodiment, with Indigenous presence and resurgence involving intimate and reciprocal relationships (8). Haraway's notion of the Chthulucene involves a chthonic understanding of presence and resurgence in relation to sympoeisis, making-with or becoming-with (4). Catastrophic de-worlding requires making refuges critical to survival and recuperation. The refuge offered by radical fantasy is that of a good story, which can "reach into rich pasts to sustain thick presents to keep the story going for those who come after" (Haraway 125).

The feeling of presence has these resonant qualities, and further exploration of resonance as part of the experience of fantasy could be articulated through Benjamin's poetic and acoustic concepts of language as they relate to aura, and as part of the embodied and unfinished nature of language. This idea of resonance holds potential for amplifying continuities with the second life introduced through Bakhtin, as well as incorporating Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and his essays on music. Together, resonance and presence could create paths toward a critical theory of fantasy that can reconcile the desires contained in fantastic narratives with their utopian potentialities in sensuous, embodied life.

The good stories that I have been thinking-with so far include Daniel Heath Justice's *The Way of Thorn and Thunder: The Kynship Chronicles*; N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy; Gregory Maguire's *Hiddensee*, *Wicked*, and *After Alice*; Cherie Dimaline's *Empire of Wild*; and Max Porter's *Lanny*. These radical fantasies remember and grieve, struggle and fight, love and hope. In imagining with them, I do the same, and in living in their alternate worlds for even a short while, am renewed.

References

Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002. Print.

Arendt, Hannah. "Introduction: Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940." Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. 1-58. Print.

Aristotle. *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts and Ingram Bywater. New York: Random House, 1984. Print.

Attebery, Brian. *Stories About Stories: Fantasy & the Remaking of Myth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Print.

—. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984. Print.

Bannerman, Kenn. "A Short Interview With Jack Zipes." April 2002. *Biting Dog Press*. Web. 14 March 2021. <www.bitingdogpress.com/zipes/zipes.html>.

Baum, L. Frank. *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorking, Surrey: Pippbrook Books, 2002. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. Print.

—. *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. Trans. J.A. Underwood. London: Penguin Books, 2009. Print.

—. "Surrealism." Benjamin, Walter. *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. Trans. J.A. Underwood. London: Penguin Books, 2009. 143-160. Print.

—. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.

—. "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. 83-110. Print.

Bloch, Ernst. "Art and Society." Bloch, Ernst. *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*. Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988. 18-77. Print.

—. "Art and Utopia." Bloch, Ernst. *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*. Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988. 78-155. Print.

—. "Better Castles in the Sky at the Country Fair and Circus, in Fairy Tales and Colportage." Bloch, Ernst. *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*. Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988. 167-185. Print.

—. "The Fairy Tale Moves on Its Own in Time." Bloch, Ernst. *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*. Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988. 163-166. Print.

—. *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*. Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988. Print.

Bould, Mark and China Miéville, eds. *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009. Print.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992. Print.

Clarke, Arthur C. "Hazards of Prophecy: The Failure of Imagination." *Profiles of the Future: An Enquiry Into the Limits of the Possible*. 1962. 14, 21, 36. Print.

Clute, John and John Grant. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. 1997. Web. 13 March 2016. <sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php>.

Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., Istvan. "Lucid Dreams, or Flightless Birds on Rooftops?" *Science Fiction Studies* 30.2 (2003): 288-304. Print.

Dimaline, Cherie. *Empire of Wild*. Vintage Canada Edition, 2020. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2019. Print.

—. *The Marrow Thieves*. Toronto: Dancing Cat Books, 2017. Print.

Ende, Michael. *The Neverending Story*. New York: Firebird, 2005. Print.

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2014. Print.

Feenberg, Andrew. *Between Reason and Experience: Essays in Technology and Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *History Of Madness*. Ed. Jean Khalfa. Trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa. London: Routledge, 2009. Print.

Franklin, H. Bruce. "What Are We to Make of JG Ballard's Apocalypse?" 1979. *JG Ballard.* Web. 27 April 2021. <www.jgballard.ca/criticism/ballard_apocalypse_1979.html>.

Freedman, Carl. *Art and Idea in the Novels of China Miéville*. Glyphi, 2015. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McLintock. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.

Gandesha, Samir and Johan F. Hartle, *Aesthetic Marx*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. Print.

Gandesha, Samir. "Personal communication." 14 February 2021. Discussion.

Gifford, James. *A Modernist Fantasy: Modernism, Anarchism, & the Radical Fantastic*. Victoria, BC: ELS Editions, 2018. Print.

—. "Goblin Modernism: Modernism, Anarchism, and the Radical Fantastic." *Modernism/modernity* 27.3 (2020): 551-565. Print.

Haraway, Donna. *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016. Print.

Hoffmann, E.T.A. and Alexandre Dumas. *Nutcracker and Mouse King; The Tale of the Nutcracker*. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. New York: Penguin Books, 2007. Print.

Hoffmann, E.T.A. *Tales of Hoffmann*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books, 1982. Print.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin Books, 1996. Print.

Ingold, Tim. "Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet." *Journal of Material Culture* 9.3 (2004): 315-340. Print.

—. "Designing Environments for Life." *Nature and Anthropology*. Ed. Kirsten Hastrup. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013. 233-246.

—. "One World Anthropology." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 8.1/2 (2018): 158-171. Print.

James, Edward and Farah Mendesohn, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005. Print.

—. "Radical Fantasy." *Historical Materialism* 10.4 (2002): 273-280. Print.

Jemisin, N.K. *The Fifth Season*. New York: Orbit, 2015. Print.

—. *The Obelisk Gate*. New York: Orbit, 2016. Print.

—. *The Stone Sky*. New York: Orbit, 2017. Print.

Justice, Daniel Heath. *The Way of Thorn and Thunder: The Kynship Chronicles*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2011. Print.

Kafka, Franz. "Letter to Oskar Pollak." *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*. Trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston. New York: Schocken Books, 1977. 15-16. Print.

—. *The Metamorphosis*. Trans. Stanley Corngold. New York: Bantam Books, 1972. Print.

Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966. Print.

Le Guin, Ursula K. "A Citizen of Mondath." Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Berkley Books, 1982. 15-20. Print.

—. "A Message About Messages." Le Guin, Ursula K. *Cheek by Jowl: Talks & Essays on How & Why Fantasy Matters*. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press, 2009. 125-130. Print.

—. *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Parnassus Press, 1968. Print.

—. *Cheek By Jowl: Talks & Essays on How & Why Fantasy Matters*. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press, 2009. Print.

—. "Do-It-Yourself Cosmology." Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Berkley Books, 1982. 111-116. Print.

—. "Dreams Must Explain Themselves." Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Berkley Books, 1982. 37-46. Print.

—. "Escape Routes." Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Berkley Books, 1982. 193-198. Print.

—. "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie." Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Berkley Books, 1982. 73-86. Print.

—. "It Doesn't Have to Be the Way It Is." Le Guin, Ursula K. *No Time to Spare: Thinking About What Matters*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2019. 80-84. Print.

—. *No Time to Spare: Thinking About What Matters*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2019. Print.

—. "Re-Reading Peter Rabbit." Le Guin, Ursula K. *Cheek by Jowl: Talks & Essays on How & Why Fantasy Matters*. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press, 2009. 19-24. Print.

—. "The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists." Le Guin, Ursula K. *Cheek by Jowl: Talks & Essays on How & Why Fantasy Matters*. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press, 2009. 25-42. Print.

—. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Berkley Books, 1982. Print.

—. "The Stone Ax and the Muskoxen." Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Berkley Books, 1982. 215-228. Print.

—. "The Wilderness Within." Le Guin, Ursula K. *Cheek by Jowl: Talks & Essays on How & Why Fantasy Matters*. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press, 2009. 9-18. Print.

—. "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Ed. Susan Wood. New York: Berkley Books, 1982. 29-36. Print.

—. "Why Kids Want Fantasy." Le Guin, Ursula K. *Cheek by Jowl: Talks & Essays on How & Why Fantasy Matters*. Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press, 2009. 131-135. Print.

Levitas, Ruth. *The Concept of Utopia*. Oxford: Peter Lang AG, 2010. Print.

Linebaugh, Peter and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013. Print.

Linebaugh, Peter. *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014. Print.

Löwy, Michael and Robert Sayre. *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001. Print.

Löwy, Michael. *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009. Print.

Macfarlane, Robert. *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*. London: Hamish Hamiton, 2019. Print.

Maguire, Gregory. *After Alice*. New York: HarperCollins, 2015. Print.

—. *Hiddensee*. New York: William Morrow, 2017. Print.

—. *Wicked*. New York: Harper, 1995. Print.

Manuel, Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel. *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979. Print.

Marcuse, Herbert. *Negations*. London: MayFlyBooks, 2009. Print.

—. *One-Dimensional Man*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964. Print.

—. *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. Trans. Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1978. Print.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. Print.

Marx, Karl. "Capital: Volume 1." Engels, Friedrich and Karl Marx. *Collected Works*. Vol. 35. New York: International Publishers, 1996. Web.

McNally, David. *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2012. Print.

Mendlesohn, Farah and Edward James. *A Short History of Fantasy*. Faringdon, OX: Libri Publishing, 2012. Print.

Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008. Print.

Miéville, China. "Afterword: Cognition as Ideology: A Dialectic of SF Theory." *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*. Ed. Mark Bould and China Miéville. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009. 231-248. Print.

—. "Editorial Introduction." *Historical Materialism* 10.4 (2002): 39-49. Print.

—. *Iron Council*. New York: Del Rey Books, 2004. Print.

—. *Perdido Street Station*. New York: Del Rey Books, 2000. Print.

—. *The Last Days of New Paris*. New York: Del Rey, 2016. Print.

—. *The Scar*. New York: Del Rey Books, 2002. Print.

—. "Tolkien: Middle Earth Meets Middle England." *Socialist Review* January 2002. Web. 21 April 2021. <socialistreview.org.uk/259/tolkien-middle-earth-meets-middle-england>.

—. *Un Lun Dun*. New York: Del Rey, 2008. Print.

—. "With One Bound We Are Free: Pulp, Fantasy and Revolution." 11 January 2005. *Out of the Crooked Timber of Humanity, No Striaght Thing Was Ever Made*. Web. March 2015. <crookedtimber.org/2005/01/11/with-one-bound-we-are-free-pulp-fantasy-and-revolution/>.

Monleón, José B. *A Specter is Haunting Europe: A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990. Print.

Moorcock, Michael. "Epic Pooh." Moorcock, Michael. *Wizardry & Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy*. Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain Books, 2004. 123-140. Print.

—. *Wizardry & Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy*. Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain Books, 2004. Print.

Newsinger, John. "Fantasy and Revolution: an Interview with China Miéville." *International Socialist Journal* 88 (2000). Web. 13 June 2015. <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj88/newsinger.htm>.

Porter, Max. *Lanny*. Strange Light, 2019. Print.

Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass*. New York: Yearling, 1995. Print.

Roberts, Adam. "Gothic and Horror Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 21-35. Print.

Ross, Kristin. *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*. London: Verso, 2016. Print.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus*. Ed. Maurice Hindle. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. Print.

Suvin, Darko. "Considering the Sense of 'Fantasy' or 'Fantastic Fiction': An Effusion." *Extrapolation* 41.3 (2000): 209-247. Print.

—. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979. Print.

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1992. Print.

"Symposium: Marxism and Fantasy." *Historical Materialism* 10.4 (2002): 39-316. Print.

The Golden Compass. Dir. Chris Weitz. Perf. Nicole Kidman, et al. 2007. DVD.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary, Together With Sellic Spell*. London: HarperCollins, 2017. Print.

—. "On Fairy Stories." Tolkien, J.R.R. *Tree and Leaf*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964. Print.

—. *The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the First Part of the Lord of the Rings*. London: HarperCollins, 2007. Print.

—. *The Hobbit: Or There and Back Again*. London: HarperCollins, 2000. Print.

—. *The Return of the King: Being the Third Part of the Lord of the Rings*. London: HarperCollins, 2007. Print.

—. *The Two Towers: Being the Second Part of the Lord of the Rings*. London: HarperCollins, 2007. Print.

Vasalou, Sophia. "Introduction." *Practices of Wonder: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. Ed. Sophia Vasalou. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012. 1-15. Print.

—. *Practices of Wonder: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. Ed. Sophia Vasalou. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012. Print.

—. "Wonder: Toward a Grammar." *Practices of Wonder: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. Ed. Sophia Vasalou. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012. 16-63. Print.

Vint, Sherryl. Keynote: " 'It's Not Nothing, But It Never Occurred': Utopianism, Temporality, and Fictional Spaces." *Contours* Graduate Conference on "Utopian Spaces," Simon Fraser University, Harbour Centre, Vancouver, BC. 24 November 2018. Address. <www.sfu.ca/humanities-institute/public-events/archive/2018-19/utopian-spaces.html>.

Weber, Max. "Science as a Vocation." *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. Trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946. 129-156. Print.

Wilson, Edward O. *The Origins of Creativity*. New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017. Print.

Wolfe, Gary K. "Fantasy From Dryden to Dunsany." *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 7-20. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando: A Biography*. Ed. Brenda Lyons. London: Penguin Books, 1993. Print.

Zaslove, Jerald. "Personal communication." 22 April 2016. Discussion.

—. "Replies to Morgan Uncanny, Story/Geschichte." 10 April 2021. E-mail.

Zipes, Jack. *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk & Fairy Tales*. Revised and expanded edition, 2002. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1979. Print.

Zipes, Jack. "Introduction: Toward a Realization of Anticipatory Illumination." Bloch, Ernst. *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*. Trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988. xi-xliii. Print.